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[THE STRONG MAN REELED AS THOUGH HE HAD RECEIVED A SUDDEN BLOW, THEN FANK SENSELESS AT HER FEET.]

IVA'S QUEST.

—O—

CHAPTER II.

HORNSEA is one of those watering places little known beyond its own immediate neighbourhood—a pretty, health-giving spot, connected by a single line of railway with Hull, from which place, and other Yorkshire towns, a goodly number of visitors pour in in the summer, but these are birds-of-passage. Out of the season Hornsea is another village; it seems wrapt in a great calm. The residents for the most part prefer the nine months of tranquillity. There is nothing dull about Hornsea; it has its church, its mere—aye, and even its library represented by two dozen yellow-backed railway novels, tastefully arranged on a vacant shelf in the shop of the leading draper.

For the most part everyone at Hornsea knows everyone else; but Wilmot Lodge was an exception to this rule. When old Mr. Wilmot died and left his family to shift as best way they could, the greatest curiosity had

prevailed as to the purchaser of the old house. It was too large for any but a family of means. Built centuries before, its winding passages and rambling shape were no recommendation to modern housekeepers. People suggested it was suited for a school, and only hoped it would not become a boarding-house—an institution regarded by them as decidedly lowering to the exclusiveness on which they prided themselves. Perhaps, though, they would have preferred even that to what really happened. Wilmot Lodge was leased for a long term of years to a gentleman who refused every attempt at sociability, declined every invitation sent him, and never even condescended to return his neighbours' calls.

Mr. Barton was a mystery to the place, and though a ghost story is supposed to shed lustre over a village, the presence of a living enigma is more irritating than aught else. Mr. Barton held no communication with anyone at Hornsea. The clergyman called, and was refused admittance. The few tradespeople there were received no accession to their custom from the Bartons. Three servants had come with the new proprietor of Wilmot

Lodge, and there attended to the wants of the household, which henceforward made its own bread, churned its own butter, grew its own vegetables, meat came from Hull, groceries in large consignments from the London stores. The postman was the only person who had need to use the huge brass knocker, and he was regarded by the villagers as a marvel of information, because he had once been allowed a peep at the interior of the hall while waiting for the overcharge due on a letter for Mr. Barton.

Hornsea generally disapproved of Wilmot Lodge; but in my own mind I think the place owed the Bartons a large debt of gratitude as furnishing them with a never-failing topic for conversation and bewilderment. The house had been in its present tenant's occupation for five years, when Hornsea generally was electrified by the arrival of a new-comer, a woman of haughty bearing and regal beauty, whom, in a moment of unwonted urbanity, Mr. Barton presented to the Rector as his sister.

People declared Miss Barton would not stay a week; such a lonely life would surely be distasteful to one of such attractions. They

were all wrong. Julia Barton settled down as part and parcel of Wilmot Lodge, and, what was more, contrived—without betraying any confidence reposed in her by her brother—almost to root out the prejudice excited by the mysterious silence of those five years.

Her brother, she told the Rector, was a doctor of great learning, but entirely devoted to chemistry and scientific researches; he used many of the rooms at Wilmot Lodge as laboratories; he was given up heart and soul to these pursuits, hence his solitary ways. As to his churlish reception of his neighbours, he hated society, was nervous and absent-minded, as all book-worms or students are.

She was a clever woman, and in a month she had managed to make Mr. Barton far less hated than he had been before, while she never betrayed a word of his secret life, and left the good people of Hornsea learning very little more than they had done before.

She was as popular as her brother had been the reverse. She never missed a service at church or a working party for the heathen; she bathed in summer, fished in spring, and skated in winter with unremitting zeal. Unable to invite guests to Wilmot Lodge she yet had as many invitations herself as any other lady in the place, and accepted most of them. True she could never return the hospitality she received, but she could and did repay the kindness in other ways, such as drives in her pretty basket carriage, instruction in the latest London scandal, or daintiest fancy work, according to the taste of the recipient.

The very June day when Lord Ducie received the musk-scented letter regarded by his daughter with such distaste Miss Barton and her brother were breakfasting alone, and deep in consultation.

It was a long, low room, with colonnade pillars running down the centre, reminding one of the saloon of a steamship. There were flowers on the table, flowers in hanging baskets in the windows, snowy damask of rare fineness covered the oval table; white muslin curtains were looped back from the windows, the carpet or tapestry was of cool neutral tints, the furniture light oak; the room had everything necessary for daily use, and an amount of taste and refinement about the whole which would have astonished the world at large could they have been privileged to behold it.

Julia Barton sat behind the tea-tray—a woman who must have been striking at any age, and who at thirty-five was in the zenith of her attractions.

She was of the Juno type, tall and stately, her beautifully moulded bust and sloping shoulders admirably set off by a tight-fitting dark dress. Her hair was black, smooth and satiny in texture, but without a single wave or ripple. She wore it braided in heavy plaits arranged in a coronal on her head. Her hands were large and white, her eyes blue black, her complexion olive.

At the first glance you would call her beautiful, at the second elegant. Not until you knew her well—unless you were a close observer—would it have dawned on you that the glitter of her eyes was cold and cruel, her smile hard and cunning, and that in her expression there lurked something of ferocity.

"There is no letter there."

Mr. Barton looked up—a trim, dapper little man, as unlike a dreamy student as well could be.

He had eyes and hair like his sister's, only modified; his smile was readier than hers, his features less under control. In fact, his was the weaker character.

Given training, circumstances and fate in his favour, I do think Peter Barton might have been an honest man. Nothing in the world would have made his sister a good woman.

"Of course not," said the master of the house, slowly. "There can't be a letter for two days, or even longer."

"Nonsense. Your note would get to Nether-ton this morning, then it has to be sent on

to Mr. Winter, who may be at the utmost ends of the earth for aught we know to the contrary."

Julia smiled. Her mouth was admirably shaped, the teeth her open lips disclosed were white and even, and yet I never saw her smile without an involuntary shudder.

"I fancy Mr. Winter is at Nether-ton."

"Not at all. He merely gave me that address because he was such a wanderer as to have no settled home of his own. In the seven years I have had Wilmot Lodge I never needed to write to him before. Punctual to the day the money arrived."

"And did you never send an acknowledgment?" asked Julia, sharply.

"Never. I asked him once whether it would not be more business-like. He rejoined he would always draw the cheque to order; my signature across it would then be a receipt."

"What sort of a man is he, Pete?" Pete considered.

"An aristocrat born."

"Like her?"

The Doctor shook his head.

"Not the least bit in the world—I never saw a brother and sister more unlike."

"Hem?"

"What's that for?"

"I don't believe they are brother and sister."

"Ju?"

"Well, you know you have just said he is a born aristocrat—everything about him shows it. What other would pay such princely terms and never interfere with you in the least? Oh, yes, Pete, Mr. Winter is a gentleman right enough."

"Well," said the Doctor, slowly, "how does that prevent his being her brother?"

"She is not a lady."

"Granted, but if you had gone through the vicissitudes she has I doubt if you would retain much trace of ladylike manners."

"I don't believe she ever was a lady," retorted Julia. "Come, Peter, tell me all you know about her."

"I have told you a dozen times."

"Then tell me for the thirteenth."

"I was in a small way of business down at Peckham, you know, Julia. I didn't have such a house as this, and I'd hard enough work to get a living out of it."

"Yes, yes."

"One summer night a cab drove up and a gentleman asked to speak to me. He said his sister had gone through great afflictions, that she was almost stupefied by the taking of narcotics. In no sense of the word was she insane, but it had become necessary to guard her as carefully as the most violent lunatic."

"And you said—"

"I asked what terms," he returned. "A thousand a year, provided all trouble was taken off his hands. The bargain was settled in ten minutes. He gave me bank-notes for the first quarter. I went to the cab and lifted her out. She was half-stupefied, and glared at me like a wild animal."

"And that was—"

"Fifteen years ago, Julia. She has been with me ever since. Perhaps she brought me luck. I know I have got on immensely since."

"And you have never seen Mr. Winter again?"

"Once—just as I had concluded the bargain for this place. I met him in the street. I began to tell him of my patient, but he stopped me. He desired, he said, to know nothing. I put my card into his hand with this address and we parted."

"And all these years she has never betrayed her history?"

"She has never recovered her faculties. She is not insane, but her memory is a blank. She can talk of what she did yesterday, of what she may do to-morrow, but of all the years before she came to the old house in Peckham she knows nothing, absolutely nothing. It is just as though a sponge had been passed

over her recollections, blotting them out for ever."

"And now?"

"She is dying. That fall the other day injured some vital part, and, strange freak of nature, the blow that kills her seems to restore her intelligence. She cries for her husband—her one man is to see him again."

"And yet you maintain Mr. Winter is not her husband."

"Aye. Ju, I never went about the world fishing to find out things like you do. So long as people pay me well I let them alone."

"You're a fool, Pete."

"Thank you, my dear."

"Well, you don't seem to see your own advantage. If you accept the fact this lady is Mr. Winton's sister you lose all hold upon her brother at her death."

"Of course, I do."

"If she is not his sister, if she is his wife—his wife whom he has kept hidden away to save the honour of his name, perhaps to save his children, why then at once you are possessed of a secret worth making money of."

"I don't want to make money of it. I'm not averse to anything in the way of business, Ju, but I don't care to steal a man's secrets and then levy blackmail on him afterwards."

"Well, I shall do it for you."

"I doubt your getting much out of Winter."

"But I may out of her."

She rose and left the room. The secret of Wilmot Lodge is clear to you now, reader. It was not a madhouse, in any true sense of the word; it was a hiding-place for a few poor wretches whose relations wished, from interested motives, to be rid of them.

The Peckham establishment had been begun after a much humbler fashion. Its inmates were an illegitimate child, a cantankerous old maid, and a bowed-down widow of sixty.

These paid modest terms as compared with Mr. Winter's munificence, but considerably more than ordinary boarders.

Mr. Barton, who was incorrigibly idle, and cared for nothing in the world so much as out-door sports and chemical experiments, found it a very easy way of getting a living.

He removed to Hornsea when his foundlings increased. They numbered eight when Wilmot Lodge was in the market.

He sent down the servants first to make all ready, lodged the eight victims at Hull, and drove them over in detachments at the dead of night to his new establishment.

No one in Hornsea had a suspicion of the truth. The eight unfortunates were not starved or harshly treated, but they were prisoners.

Still, the beautiful gardens, the fresh country air, must have seemed a paradise to them after the narrow street in Peckham.

Mr. Barton's boarders brought him in an income of two thousand five hundred a year. All his expenses amounted to about half that sum, so that he had a very pleasant time of it.

Another man might have shuddered at making his fortune by human misery. Pete was not of that type.

He never ill-used a "boarder," but he took good care to be out of the way in cases of insubordination, and leave his matron to do as she pleased.

He left all disagreeable details to her. He pocketed the money and drew cheques for the expenses. These were his only duties in connection with Wilmot Lodge.

But when Miss Winter contrived to fall downstairs, and the fall seemed at one and the same time to strike her deathblow and reawake her intellect, the matron grew uneasy.

She insisted that a doctor should be sent for; she hinted if death claimed the patient there might be such things as inquests and inquiries into her death.

Peter pooh-poohed her arguments for some time; then he gave way, and sent for Dr. Grenaway, the oldest and most easy-going practitioner within reach.

But the show was made ready, the stage arranged first. Miss Winter was carried into Julia Barton's room, dressed in one of her lace-trimmed night-dresses, and laid in her own bed.

Julia took up her station as sick nurse, and only passed into the anteroom to receive Dr. Grenaway, her handkerchief to her eyes.

"Such a very sad accident! Their first visitor, too! Miss Winter had come to Horsea to see what change would do for her. She had suffered great domestic affliction, and was troubled by nervous restlessness. She seemed to improve at first; then accidentally she pitched down one of the winding staircases. They had done their best. At first she declared she was only shaken, but Mr. Barton grew uneasy, and had empowered his sister to summon Dr. Grenaway."

"Dear me! I thought Mr. Barton was in our line himself," said the listener, simply.

"He never practices. My brother is given up entirely to scientific pursuits."

"Ah! Shall we see the patient now, Miss Barton?"

"If you please. She is quite delirious. I have been up two nights with her."

"You will be quite worn out," said the Doctor, kindly; and then he followed her to Miss Winter's sick bed.

The room was large and comfortably furnished; it lacked none of those small belongings women love to gather round them—a pretty disarray of lace and trifles on the dressing-table, some vases, a glass of flowers, a few books and pictures. Clearly Miss Winter and her brother had done their best to do honour to this guest.

She was lying with her eyes half closed—a tall, bony woman, with a puff, swollen face, bleared eyes, and scanty grey hair. The hand stretched on the coverlet did not look a lady's hand; in fact, there was nothing to indicate gentility about Miss Winter.

"Come, Margaret, I have brought the doctor."

"I reckon it's not much use," said the woman, opening her eyes.

"Come, come," said Dr. Grenaway, kindly, "you mustn't talk like that. What is the matter?"

"Everything."

"Where do you feel pain?"

"Everywhere."

"Dear, dear, that's bad! Let me feel your pulse."

It was beating at fever pace, her temples throbbled violently.

"She must have suffered some great excitement," he pronounced oracularly to Julia. Then to the patient, "I hope you have nothing painful on your mind?"

"Aye, but I have."

"And what? We must set your mind at ease before we do anything else."

"I want my husband."

The doctor started.

"I thought you said 'Miss' Winter," he whispered to his conductress.

"She is 'Miss' Winter," returned Julia, in the same low tone; "at least, we have always called her so, and my brother has known her for more than fifteen years."

"I want my husband."

"Yea," said the Doctor, soothingly—he always humoured such people. "Where is he? I will send for him at once."

"They won't let you."

"Who?"

"Her," and the woman pointed to Julia. "Oh, she's a deep one! Her brother's bad enough, but he's no patch upon her."

"She must mistake me for someone else," said Julia, blandly. "Margaret, don't you know me, dear?"

"Don't dear me," retorted "Miss" Winter. "I tell you I want my husband."

"Where is he?" again inquired the Doctor. "When did you see him last?"

"Fifteen years ago. He brought me here. I was ill then, half mad they say, but he'd no right to give me to these people."

"My dear lady, you must be dreaming."

"I am not. I hated him; we went our different roads, but I swore to have my revenge, and I kept my oath."

"Your revenge on whom?"

"My husband. Ah, I spoilt his life! I didn't care much what I did then, and I went to the bad. He found me and brought me here, and then I remember nothing more. It is all one long blank; I seem only to have just woken up."

"You dreamed all this."

"I did not. It is just as though they put a stone on my brain all these years, and it had rolled away. I remember everything now, to the time I came here. I know what it means, I don't want you to tell me. I know I am dying, but, old man, before I go I must see my husband."

"That is how she goes on constantly," said Julia, when she had withdrawn to the anteroom with Dr. Grenaway; "we are half beside ourselves. My brother has sent for Mr. Winter, urging him to come and judge for himself of his sister's state."

The general practitioner looked puzzled.

"Of course she is raving, but there seemed a deal of reason in her ramblings. Have you ever met this Mr. Winter?"

"Never; my brother has seen him once."

"I should not wonder if she was right. He wouldn't be the first man who denied a marriage that had grown irksome to him."

"I am sure you're wrong him," said Julia, whose views must have undergone a considerable change since her conversation with her brother. "Peter has the highest possible opinion of Mr. Winter. He is convinced these ravings are simply the wanderings of delirium."

"When do you expect Mr. Winter?"

"The letter was posted yesterday. We urged him to come quickly, but he may be from home."

"True. I fear we cannot count on his seeing her alive!"

Julia shuddered.

"Then you think her very ill?"

"She is dying; it is only a question of a day or two. I doubt myself if she will last another night!"

"As bad as that?"

"She may suffer a great deal. Miss Barton, you had better let me send you in anurse?"

"Oh, no," and her voice softened. "I could not leave her to hired hands. I will nurse her myself!"

"It is not a fit scene for you."

"I cannot forsake her."

"Well, I am much against it. I can only advise you to keep her as quiet as possible, and humour her in all things. I will look in again later."

CHAPTER III.

JULIA went back to the sick-room; she meant to nurse Margaret Winter herself. She knew that she had spoken only truth, but the reason was very different from what Dr. Grenaway had imagined it.

She dared not trust the patient with a stranger lest she should reveal the secrets of her prison-house; and she had another motive subtler still.

She was shrewd enough to guess there was a mystery in this woman's life. She meant to worm it out and reap the harvest of hush-money when death should have set its seal on those erring lips for ever.

"Do you think he'll come?"

"Your husband?"

"Yes; you know he is my husband, what ever people say. Miss Barton, I can't die until I have seen him again!"

"I think he is sure to come, Miss Winter."

"Don't call me that."

"Mrs. Winter, then."

She shook her head.

"Say Margaret; that at least is my name—say Margaret just short, without a handle."

Julia passed a damp sponge over the burning brow with no untender hand. She meant to win this woman's confidence.

"Are you easier now, Margaret?"

"I shall never be easier again. I am dying. Well, he has wished me dead long enough!"

"How cruel!"

"No it wasn't!" said the woman, sharply.

"I had done him the cruellest wrong woman can do to man! You didn't think I was a murderess?"

"Oh, no."

"I am! I killed her—killed her as she stood before me, a slight, delicate, girlish thing in a soft, white frock! I killed her, I tell you, and her death-cry has rung in my ears ever since. Her face has haunted me; it was that drove me so low. I was killing myself by inches, when he found me and took me to Peckham!"

"And whom did you kill?—your child?"

"My child? I never had one; if I had things might have been different. No, I tell you I killed her, his darling—killed her under his eyes. He put out his arms to shelter her—he pillowed her head upon his breast, but it was too late—the blow had struck home!"

"And yet you want to see him?"

"Aye, I want him to forgive me."

"And you think he will?"

"He ought," said the dying woman, slowly.

"You see I've tried to make up."

Julia wondered what she meant.

"I knew he'd give his life to keep the secret," muttered the dying woman; "his life and his wealth too. That's why he hid me here. Well, I have kept it. I've never breathed a word. I've let myself be called by a name not mine. I've kept his secret."

Julia was touched in spite of herself. Had there really been such a generous thought in the obstinate silence this woman had kept for well nigh fifteen years?

Miss Barton often heard of the patients from the matron and her brother before she came to Wilmot Lodge, and she knew Margaret Winter had been an example of taciturn obstinacy.

From the day of her admission at Peckham to that of her accident she had never once spoken of her past life—never once. She had no memorials of the past, no treasures. Her one possession was a good-sized tin locket, such as, filled with camphor, are sold at very trifling cost during an epidemic of smallpox or any other infectious disorder. To this locket she was passionately attached.

Miss Barton—never cruel without necessity—had given orders she was to keep it, and to be supplied with whitening and leather to polish it to the state of brilliancy which so delighted her.

The locket, still bright as silver, glittered now on her white nightdress, and as she spoke it came to Julia as a revelation that if there were any secret connected with her life that locket held the clue.

"He will forgive you when he knows you have kept his confidence," whispered Julia.

"He said he never would."

"Why not?"

"Because of her."

"Who was she?"

"A penniless governess," and a sparkle of hatred lit up the dying eyes. "He often threw it in my teeth I was not a lady, but I had a tidy sum in the bank and a sight of fine clothes. She had nothing in the world but her pretty face and her star-like eyes."

"She was pretty then?"

Margaret softened.

"She had an angel's face," she said, sadly.

"Oh! I watched her often before I did it, and I used to think it was no wonder——"

"No wonder what?"

"That he loved her."

"And you killed her?"

"Haven't I told you so? Didn't I see them carry her to the little burial-ground, and hear the dull thud of the earth as it fell upon her coffin? Oh! yes, I killed her."

"But you are sorry now?"

Margaret looked doubtful.

"I'm not sorry I killed her. I'm sorry for what went before, but not for that. It seems to me it was more merciful, for, you see, she had an angel's face. It was right that she should sing among the angels."

Julia closed the door and crept away. She had seen a telegraph boy coming up the drive to the house, and she wanted to know what message he brought.

A very brief one, and the sender's name was simply inserted as Smith:—

"Mr. Winter not here. Expect him at Hornsea to-morrow between five and six."

"It will be too late," breathed Julia; "she is sinking fast already."

"I don't suppose he'll mind. She isn't a very fascinating object to behold, and as he has done without her for fifteen years he can't have any very overpowering affection for her."

"Peter, you're a simpleton!"

"You've said that before, Ju. Tell me something else for a change."

"What makes you so dull?"

"A thousand a year is a good bit to lose, my dear; I don't like the thought of it."

"Perhaps he'll come down handsomely."

"He has been doing that for fifteen years."

"Pete, I want to ask you something."

"Ask away."

"When Mr. Winter comes, I want to see him, even if she is gone."

"All right."

"Send him straight to the anteroom; I will see him there."

"All right."

"Don't you wonder what I want with him?" Barton shook his head.

"You're a very clever woman, Ju; I never wonder at anything you do, I know there's a method in it, if I could only make it out. There's only one thing surprises me."

"And that—"

"That with all your cleverness and your good looks, for I never saw a woman to hold a candle to you, you're still unmarried."

She laughed.

"I mean to marry some day."

"When?"

"When I find anyone rich enough to make it worth while. Till then I prefer my freedom."

"You're ambitious, Ju."

"Yes," and her eyes sparkled. "I do want to be rich."

"We've been pretty comfortable lately."

"I want more than that."

"Want more?"

"I want not only to be in society, but to be of it. I want to lead, not to follow; I want to make a name for myself, to have my beauty admired as it ought to be; horses, carriages, and jewels—I mean to have them all before I die."

"But you were thirty-five last birthday, Ju; wouldn't it be as well to make haste?"

She smiled disdainfully.

"I am in no hurry, Pete; surely you know that all things come to those who wait?"

"Including old age," said Peter, a little cruelly, and then he went to his laboratory, while Miss Barton turned her back to the sick room.

She had on a pair of thin French slippers. Her step was at all times light, now it was perfectly noiseless, her soft clinging dress of nun's veiling, her velvet tread, conspired to make her entrance to the anteroom unheard. She drew a chair to the archway leading to the sick room and sat down. She could see alike the bed and its occupant as well as if she had been at her former post by Margaret's side.

She—Margaret—the woman who called herself a murderess, who had been for so many years a source of gain to the Bartons—lay back upon the pillows with a strange look

of peace upon her face, and her hands played feverishly with the locket fastened round her neck.

Julia saw her open it and take out a piece of folded paper; she spread it out before her and smoothed the creases lovingly:

"I will give it him," she whispered, "and tell him no eye has seen it except mine since that awful day; he must forgive me then."

Crash! A heavy table in the anteroom had fallen to the ground with a noisy thump. The dying woman, terrified, closed her eyes and sank back in one of the fainting attacks so common since her accident.

One glance, to be quite sure she was unconscious, and Julia Barton sprang noiselessly to the bedside. The locket still hung open, the paper lay unfolded on the bed. Bending forward she closed the locket, the paper she hid in her bosom. She must not look at it or think of it now. Something in that still face, in those fast closed eyes, told her this attack was different from its fellows; she seemed to know that all was over for the woman who had been so long a mystery to her brother.

She rang the bell. The matron came in haste, put one finger on the pulse, and whispered, "It's all over, Miss Barton. Oh! what a mercy the master listened to us and sent for Dr. Grenaway. What would have happened else?"

"Are you sure she's dead?"

"Sure enough, Miss Julia. Well, it's not our fault; I'm sure the master grudged her nothing—he'd have given her gold to eat if she could have taken it!"

Which was strictly true. Peter Barton would have done very much to keep that woman, hardened sinner though she was, alive; her death meant a fearful loss to him.

Julia went to her own room, locked the door, and took out the paper kept with such loyal secrecy by the dead Margaret for fifteen years. Miss Barton read it as one unable to believe her eyes; then she calmly dressed herself for walking, and went downstairs.

"You are never going out, Ju?"

"I must, Peter."

"But with a death in the house? You see, as old Grenaway was called in, I shall be bound to make a fuss, every blind must be lowered, and a regular pretence of woe stuck up."

"Dr. Grenaway won't be here before six, I shall be home by five at latest; you can begin your pretence of woe when I get back."

"But where are you going?"

"To Hull."

"What on earth for?"

"Something I want."

"Can't you make shift with Hornsea shops for once, Ju? Really you'd better."

Julia faced round on him.

"I know what I'm about, Peter. I tell you I must go to Hull for your sake and mine!"

He yielded.

"You needn't make such a fuss, Ju; I only thought it seemed strange."

She was not a demonstrative woman; very rarely did she betray her feelings; but now she bent down and kissed him on the cheek.

"You will be a rich man yet, Peter!"

"Looks like it, when I've lost nearly half my income," he said, ruefully.

"Never mind; I predict you will look back to this day as the beginning of prosperity!"

She was off. Wilmot Lodge was not far from the railway station; luckily (or she thought so) she met no one she knew. It was a most objectionable day, one of those down-pours of rain which afflict our country sometimes, even in summer, but Julia rather relished the state of the atmosphere. It had given her an excuse for wearing a mackintosh and tying a thick veil over her bonnet; both these articles belonged to the matron, and were borrowed for the occasion, as Julia had reasons of her own for not wishing to excite attention.

Hull looked wretched when she reached it—the town usually does look so in wet weather

—the streets were greasy with mud, the sky a leaden grey, with suggestions of peaseoup in the thickness of the air. If one had only closed one's eyes to the dusky leaves it would have been easy to mistake June for November; but Julia did not seem to care. She plodded on until she came to a huge stationer's and library; here she entered, and made a very courteous request to the attendant.

She was a perfect stranger in the shop; she raised her veil and let her beautiful face smile upon the man of whom she had asked a favour. He might have refused an old woman, or an ugly one, but he was like wax in Miss Barton's skilful hands. He disappeared into an inner room sacred to the subscribers to the library, and returned in a moment with a bulky blue and gilt volume in his hands.

Julia thanked him with another smile, opened the volume, and turned its pages with feverish impatience until she came to the name she sought, then taking a slip of paper and a pencil from her pocket she diligently copied down the extract.

The whole affair only took a few minutes, perhaps five. She hurried back to the station, caught the return train to Hornsea, and when Dr. Grenaway paid his promised visit that evening looked the picture of a disconsolate mourner in a loose black dress and soft surah sash; it never entered into his head that she had been absent a minute from the sick-bed.

"It is all over," she said, gravely, "and she did not suffer much; she went off quite suddenly in a swoon."

"It must have been very painful for you. I trust you were not alone with her?"

A few more remarks, and he went away convinced that Miss Barton was the most devoted and self-sacrificing of women, and that Mr. Winter ought to recompense her extraordinary attentions to his wife—or sister—by a very handsome present.

"Shall you go and meet him?" asked Miss Julia of her brother the next afternoon.

"No; and I think, Julia, you shall do the receiving by yourself. I know you're awfully clever; but, somehow, I never can bear to see you talking to people when you're on your high horse, it makes me want to laugh!"

"As you please," she returned, coldly.

The moment had come; Julia heard the wheels of the pony carriage they had sent to the station. She knew that the man Margaret had called her husband was approaching; she went towards the door of the ante-room with outstretched hand and a strange fluttering at her heart. She saw a man with nobility stamped on every feature, a man whose face, despite its deep, grave melancholy, might well have won a woman's heart. The servant who had preceded him announced him as Mr. Winter, and retired.

Miss Barton looked into his eyes with a strange earnestness and said, simply,—

"Your wife died in my arms; she had no secrets from me. I know everything, and I cannot call you Mr. Winter!"

The strong man reeled as though he had received a sudden blow, then, to her horror, sank senseless at her feet.

(To be continued.)

REFINEMENT AND HAPPINESS.—It is a doubt whether the refinement of modern times have or have not been a drawback upon our happiness, for plainness and simplicity of manners have given way to etiquette, formality, and deceit; while the ancient hospitality has now almost entirely deserted our land, and what we appear to have gained in head we seem to have lost in heart.

How little is known of what is in the bosom of those around us! We might explain many a coldness could we look into the heart concealed from us; we should often pity where we curl the lip with scorn and indignation. To judge without reserve of any human action is a culpable tamerity—of all our sins the most unfeeling and frequent.

HILDA'S FORTUNES.

—30—

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

IDA remained at the window without speaking—indeed, doubt and surprise held her silent, for she was uncertain whether this was a new trick of Fanshawe's, or whether the stranger spoke the truth in calling himself "a friend."

The latter seemed to guess the reason of her silence.

"My sole object is for your interest," he said, as if in answer to her mental doubt, "and you may trust me as you would your nearest, and dearest. Come down and speak to me—that is to say, if you are not locked in."

"I am not locked in," the girl returned, rather surprised at the suggestion.

"Then lose no time in joining me."

She hesitated a moment, but as she have seen she was, as a rule, courageous enough, and it was only in the presence of Fanshawe that her will lost its usual energy. The stranger might be a friend or might be a foe. From the earnest tones of his peculiarly sweet voice she was inclined to believe the former; and so, throwing a shawl round her shoulders, she slipped quietly downstairs, and out on the terrace, where, in an angle of the building, whose shadow formed a very good place of concealment, she found the unknown.

"Who are you?" she asked, keeping a respectful distance from him, and speaking in the same low tone in which their previous conversation had been conducted.

"I am, as I told you before, a friend. I am called Nadir, and I live at Dering Castle. Perhaps you have heard of me?"

"Yes," said Ida, puzzled and relieved at the same time, "I have heard of you, but I have never seen you, and I cannot understand why you should trouble yourself with my affairs."

"I will explain that later on, but believe me, I would do anything in my power to help you if only"—he came nearer, and whispered the latter part of his sentence into her ear—"if only because Colonel Fanshawe has done me a great injury, and I know him to be a vile, wicked man!"

Although the words were whispered they were full of energy, and instinctively carried with them a conviction of truth and sincerity.

"How did you know I was here?" demanded Ida, more in the dark than ever.

"In [the first place I learned accidentally that you had been seen on the platform at Charing-cross station with Colonel Fanshawe, waiting for the continental express; and, secondly, your former maid, Lucy Morris, came to Dering a few days ago, complaining bitterly of the way in which she had been dismissed, and saying she was sure you knew nothing about it, and that Colonel Fanshawe and his housekeeper had between them concocted the accusation against her honesty. All the village was talking of it, so it was no wonder it came to my ears, for, as you know, Lucy Morris was a great favourite with everybody, from the Rector downwards."

"Yes," murmured Ida, "I know she was—poor Lucy!"

"Still," pursued Nadir, with some emotion, "even if I had not heard Lucy's tale I should have found you out, for no one knows better than I do the villainy of which Colonel Fanshawe is capable; and directly I heard you had come to the south of France I suspected you were here."

"Then you know the place?"

"Yes," very sadly; "I know it only too well. But we will not speak of myself, for I must not detain you here very long for fear of being seen. One thing, the Colonel is not in the house, for I watched him drive away about half-an-hour ago, and I only waited until it grew dusk to try and attract your attention."

"But how did you know which was my room?" asked Ida, shrewdly.

"Because it was the only upstairs one in

which a fire was burning, and as the servants are all in the other wing I guessed it to be yours."

"Suppose your guess had been wrong?"

"In that case I should not have discovered myself, for I could have easily withdrawn into the shadow without fear of being seen. You must remember that as you appeared at the window your figure was distinctly outlined against the firelight within, consequently there was no danger of my speaking to the wrong person. Are you convinced now of my good faith?"

"Yes," said Ida, hesitating a little, "I think I am."

Nadir seemed to understand. She made a mental reservation as he answered thus, and he sighed, as if hopeless of persuading her of his sincerity.

"Yes," she said again, and in a more assured tone, "I may say I am quite convinced."

"Well, then, tell me the position of affairs here. My fears have been all the more terrible because they have been vague. How does Colonel Fanshawe conduct himself towards you and your father?"

"As a friend to my father, and a lover to me!" was the terse reply.

"A lover to you!" in a tone of suppressed horror. "Do you mean to say he has dared to profess affection for you?"

"He has done more than that—he has declared his intention of marrying me whether I will or no!"

Nadir drew a sharp breath, as if his indignation would not let him speak. Then he said,—

"And you?"

"I hate him, but all the same I fear him."

"Has he ever"—the Hindoo laid his hand on her arm, and she could feel that he trembled violently—"has he ever tried to exercise a mesmeric power over you?"

"Yes," Ida returned, gathering from this question that Nadir must be well acquainted with the characteristics of the man of whom he spoke; "he has often tried, and although he has not yet got my will entirely under his control, I must confess that he has obtained some sort of influence over it."

Nadir wrung his hand, and seemed deeply affected.

"You must be got away—you must leave the château at once!" he exclaimed, in a low, intense whisper. "At all hazards you shall be saved!"

There was no doubting the sincerity of his emotion. No actor, however good, could have charged his voice with such an accent of half-frantic despair, and beneath its influence Ida's last doubt died away.

Whatever might be the origin of the interest taken in her by Nadir, there could be no fear of its not being a genuine one.

In a few words as she could she told him of Sir Douglas's illness, and the position of affairs generally at the château.

"And you say that when you are with him Colonel Fanshawe exercises a certain control over you?" anxiously questioned the Hindoo as she finished.

"Yes, in a degree, but the influence is considerably lessened when I am in the presence of a third person."

"He has never thrown you into a mesmeric trance?"

"No; he has tried to do so, but I have resisted, and, thus far, successfully."

"Thank Heaven for that! Does your father know anything about all this?"

"Nothing, except that the Colonel made me an offer of marriage, which I rejected. I have had no opportunity of telling him anything lately, for I have not seen him for nearly a week."

"You must force yourself into his presence," said Nadir, vehemently; "and tell him everything. There is only one alternative besides!"

"And what is that?"

"An immediate departure from the château!"

"Do you mean alone?"

"Yes, if you cannot get your father to accompany you."

"But I cannot leave him here—ill!"

"You must do so, if he is not able to come with you. He runs the risk of no danger, or at least the danger that threatens him is nothing compared with that which threatens you. Don't you see that this influence of Fanshawe's increases, and if it goes on increasing at the same ratio it will, in the end, entirely vanquish your will?"

"Yes, I see that."

"Then you must not give it the chance. I tell you, Ida"—she did not notice how readily her name fell from his lips—"that delay is dangerous, and every moment you remain at the château the danger is increased!"

"But what can I do?" exclaimed the girl, deeply impressed by his manner, and at this confirmation of her own fears. "Where can I go? You forget I have no friends."

"Go to Miss Fitzherbert," said the Hindoo, after a slight pause of reflection. "She is good and kind—a noble woman—and she will give you all the help in her power. She was ill when I left the Castle, but I hope by this time she is convalescent. Yes, go to her."

"And what is to become of papa?"

"He will leave the château when he knows you have gone. As I have said before, the risk he runs is nothing compared with yours."

Ida reflected for a few moments, but the step she was asked to take was such a serious one that she could not at once permit herself to be persuaded.

"I must have time to think," she said, at last, in an agitated voice. "Your presence here has taken me entirely by surprise, and until I have deliberated upon what you advise I cannot give you an answer. When shall I see you again?"

"To-morrow, if you will."

"Where are you staying?"

"At the nearest village—there is an inn there, and I have taken a room."

"But that is five miles away!" exclaimed Ida.

"Yes. Unfortunately I could not get any nearer to the château, or I should have done so. Luckily, I am a good walker, so the distance counts for nothing." Nadir stopped, looked round as if to reassure himself they were alone, then continued, in a still lower tone than before, "Has Sir Douglas ever spoken to you of your mother, Ida?"

The girl drew herself away with a movement of hauteur, as if she resented this intrusion on a topic which should have been sacred.

Nadir was quick to observe the gesture, and interpreted it aright.

"Forgive me if I have wounded you!" he exclaimed, quickly. "You have answered me without speech. Perhaps you judge Lady St. John as severely as her husband and the world judged her, but if you do you are wrong! I knew your mother, and I tell you she was a true wife and loyal mother—as innocent of guile as yourself!"

Ida was absolutely amazed at this declaration, coming from such a source. It seemed to her the world was full of mysteries to-night.

"How did you know her—what was she to you?" she questioned, breathlessly.

"That I cannot tell you now, but I will do so some other time. I will see you to-morrow if you can manage to slip out unobserved. There is a plantation of fir trees on the other side of the road at the bottom of the approach, and I will be inside it at eleven o'clock. Will that suit you?"

"Yes. If I can get out I will meet you."

"Now, farewell," said the Hindoo, moving away, but coming back again a second later "Look your door, and prevent Colonel Fanshawe from seeing you alone," he whispered impressively, and then disappeared in the deeper shadows cast by the house.

Ida went to her room, greatly mystified at the occurrences of the evening. Who was this strange being? What did he mean by his assertions of her mother's innocence, uttered in a tone that carried with it a conviction of truth.

If she had, indeed, been guiltless! Ida clasped her hands together at the thought; for granting this hypothesis, the barrier separating her from Dering melted away into the thinnest of thin air.

Needless to say she was in a state of excitement that effectually banished sleep, and all night long she mentally went over the conversation that had taken place between Nadir and herself, and tried to solve the mystery of his words, and the interest he appeared to take in her. Should she trust him, or was he only a charlatan trying to impose upon her?

It was impossible to say. At one moment she inclined to one opinion, and the next to another.

One thing only was quite clear, and that was, that she must meet him the next day and ask him for further explanations.

Ida was not particularly romantic, and the practical side of her nature liked to have everything clearly demonstrated before she committed herself either to opinion or action.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

The morning after their meeting at the "Feathers" Eric and his aunt set out for the cottage indicated to them by Mrs. Sibley as belonging to Susan Lloyd—sister of the Anne Lloyd whose whereabouts they were anxious to discover.

Before they had gone far, Lucy, who had been wrapped in thought, came to a full stop.

"What is it?" asked Eric.

"I have arrived at the conclusion that it will be best to ask Mrs. Sibley to get the address," she replied. "If, as seems probable, Anne Lloyd is in Lady Hawksley's pay, she would have to guard against any inquiries that might happen to be made, and would probably leave instructions that her address was not to be given to strangers. In the event of our asking for it she would be informed immediately, and that might arouse her suspicions, and prevent our mission from succeeding. Do you see?"

Eric acquiesced, thinking to himself how much more subtle the feminine intellect was than the masculine.

"Whereas," pursued his aunt, "if Mrs. Sibley goes to the cottage, and makes some excuse for wanting to know where Anne lives, her request will be considered a perfectly natural one, and she will gain her end without any difficulty. She is a good-natured woman, and will not mind the trouble, especially," Lucy added, with a smile, "if you ask her, and pay her a compliment or two!"

The compliment was found to be quite unnecessary, for the landlady immediately expressed her willingness to get the address.

"You need not mention that I want it," Eric said, "that is, if you have any feasible excuse for wanting to get it for yourself."

"I can easily manufacture one," returned the buxom landlady, with her genial smile. "When I saw Anne Lloyd last—she comes down about every twelve months—I promised her a jar of my walnut pickles, which I pride myself are better than any you'll get in London," tossing her head in a self-conscious fashion; "so I can say I want the address in order to start off the jar."

Half-an-hour later she sallied forth, while Eric and his aunt, after reading the letter forwarded by Dr. West, which proved to be in Lord Westlynn's writing, went to look over Ivy Cottage, and on the grave where poor Florence lay buried.

When they returned they found Mrs. Sibley back again, and she immediately handed them the address:—

"ANNE LLOYD,
32, Severn Road,
Paddington."

They thanked her, and as they had no further motive for staying in Elvaaston packed up their few belongings, wished the good-natured landlady "good-bye," and were soon in the train, on their way to London.

"How long do you intend staying away from Dering Court?" Eric asked, after they had started.

"As long as it suits my convenience," replied his aunt. "Lady Hawksley has procured a substitute from the village, so I shall not hurry back on her account. Indeed, it is doubtful whether I return at all, for I think I have drained all the sources of information which are available to me at the Court, and now I must seek for others elsewhere. I have no definite plan of action at present, but shall let myself be guided by future circumstances."

"Will you come and stay with me while you are in town?"

She shook her head.

"No, it would not do, for if—as is very probable—Lady Hawksley puts a watch on your movements my presence would at once become known to her, and that is not at all desirable. I can be in constant communication with you, however."

"Shall you ask this woman point-blank what the 'secret' is between her and Lady Hawksley, or shall you approach the subject in a more roundabout manner?" he said, presently.

"Anne Lloyd do you mean? I cannot say what I shall do yet, for I must first of all see what sort of a person she is, and then decide on the best method of surprising her confidence. In any case, I shall not put the question you suggest 'point-blank,'" added Lucy, smiling.

The young man laughed.

"You must forgive my blunders; I am a soldier, not a detective, and, therefore, not competent to conduct such delicate cases as these."

"No," she returned, "I fancy that if you had been left to yourself you would not have discovered much, for, as you say, the detective business is not at all in your line."

Arrived at Paddington they had a hasty meal at the station, left their luggage in the cloak-room, and then started off together to find Severn-road.

It was not a very difficult task, for the road was quite close to the station, and proved to be a very decent thoroughfare, with a row of moderately-sized houses on either side.

"I will go on alone," Lucy said, as they read the name of the road on an adjacent lamp-post, "and you can remain here until I come back."

Thereupon she trotted off—a quiet little figure, neatly dressed in black, and wearing a pair of blue-tinted spectacles, which effectually disguised her soft brown eyes.

"No. 32" was as like its neighbours as two peas in a pod, with this difference, that it had inside its fanlight a card bearing upon it the printed inscription of "Apartments."

Here was Lucy's way made clear to her. She rang the bell, and asked the particularly dirty servant who answered it whether her mistress was at home.

"She's at home. Is it the rooms you want to look at?" questioned this much-begrimed young lady, with an air of easy familiarity.

"Yes. Do you mind telling me your mistress's name?" asked Lucy, not knowing whether the person she sought was the landlady or one of the lodgers.

The servant's reply set this doubt at rest.

"Miss Lloyd—that's her name."

Lucy soon had the pleasure of seeing her, for she was at once ushered into a room where she was sitting, and if first impressions go for anything it cannot be said she was prepossessed in her favour.

Anne Lloyd was a tall, thin, angular woman

of about fifty-five, dressed in a rusty black silk, and wearing several rings on her red and bony fingers. She looked a shrew, and, if one might form an opinion from the decidedly pink tinge of her sharp nose, a shrew to whom spirituous liquors were not disagreeable!

"Good afternoon, ma'am," she said, rising, and offering Lucy a chair. "Are you looking for apartments? I have a couple of rooms, just vacant, which I am sure will suit you—large, airy, well-furnished, with every convenience, excellent attendance, and extremely moderate in price. Shall I show them to you?"

Lucy acquiesced, and was thereupon introduced to the rooms—which, it may be mentioned, did not in one single particular agree with the description given. However, she took them for a month, and paid ten shillings on account—a little formula which Miss Lloyd insisted upon, having, as she said, been so frequently swindled by people who had taken the apartments, and never appeared again.

After this she returned to the end of the street where Eric was waiting, told him what she had done, and then took a cab to the station, fetched her portmanteau, parted from her nephew, and went back to Severn-road to take possession of her new rooms.

She had, as she told Eric, no definite plan of action with regard to Anne Lloyd, for experience had taught her the wisdom of letting circumstances guide her rather than wasting her time by trying, beforehand, to guide them. All the same, neither she or her nephew had any doubt of ultimate success, for thus far Fate had seemed to favour their endeavours, and, with the combined forces of mature experience and energetic youth, they certainly had every chance of achieving their object.

Time and artificial disguises had so altered her that her sister's former servant entirely failed to recognise in Mrs. Everett the Miss Jones who had visited Ivy Cottage over twenty years ago.

Anne Lloyd, although not inclined to be communicative, did not, on the other hand, object to an occasional gossip with her quiet little lodger, who had the double recommendation of having paid her rent in advance and giving very little trouble to the maid-of-all-work.

"Letting lodgings is not a particularly pleasant way of making both ends meet, I should think," observed Lucy one day, about a week after her arrival in Severn-road.

"No; not if you depend upon it for a living, which I do not," returned Miss Lloyd, with dignity. "I have a private income of my own, and I only let those rooms in the house that I have no use for!"

"Ah!" assented Mrs. Everett, pleasantly, "that, of course, is quite a different thing."

So Anne Lloyd had a "private income!" Lucy had learned from Mrs. Sibley that Susan Lloyd and the rest of the family were poor, hard-working people, but that Anne had had "a stroke of luck"—the landlady did not know where it came from—which had made her better off than her relatives. No mention had been made of a "private income," and Lucy shrewdly conjectured that it might be translated as meaning an annuity from Lady Hawksley.

Now Lady Hawksley was certainly not the sort of woman to spend her money recklessly; as a matter of fact, she was rather parsimonious in her habits, and was looked upon at Dering Court as a sort of miser. It therefore followed that if she allowed Anne Lloyd an annuity it must be because the latter possessed some knowledge which made it worth while for her to do so.

"Have you lived in London very long?" asked Lucy, continuing the conversation, which had ceased while these thoughts passed through her mind.

"Over twenty years," responded Miss Lloyd. "From a girl I always said I should like to come up here, and"—a satisfied smile stole over her thin lips—"I played my cards so well

that I managed it, where many another woman would be slaving away in service. I hated having a mistress over me—it suits me better to be mistress over some one else!”

Like the rest of the sex, she had her weak points—the two weakest were vanity and gin! Lucy tried to gain her confidence through both of these, but was unsuccessful, for Anne Lloyd was by nature cautious, and not even the influence of sundry stiff glasses of “grog” had power to unloosen her tongue with regard to the subject upon which her lodger wished to be informed.

She speedily grew intimate with Lucy, however, and they frequently had tea together, sometimes in the sitting-room of the one, and sometimes in that of the other.

Once when Lucy was in her landlady's apartment she noticed a large, iron safe on one side of the fireplace, which looked incongruous and out of place in a parlour.

“Why do you keep that in here?” she asked, directing Miss Lloyd's attention to it.

“Because it is safer here than anywhere,” responded the latter.

“Do you mean safer from fire?”

“From fire and thieves.”

“Then I suppose you keep your valuables there?”

“Yes, I do; but my valuables aren't money or jewellery,” she returned, as she wished her companion to know there was nothing worth stealing inside the safe. “I make a rule of putting my money in the bank, and of wearing all the rings and chains that are worth anything about my person.”

“You are wise,” laughed Lucy. “Thieves would not gain much by coming here. But what do you keep inside that big iron affair?”

“Only old letters and such like. One doesn't care for one's private affairs to be known to everybody, and there's no chance of anyone knowing mine, for the lock is one of Chubb's, and I always wear the key round my neck. I had the chance of buying the safe cheap at a sale once, and very useful I've found it since.”

After this conversation Lucy decided that Lady Hawksley's letters would probably be amongst the “private affairs” Anne Lloyd took such pains to keep secret, and at once made up her mind that she must see the inside of the safe.

This, however, was more easily resolved than effected, for if its owner wore the key round her neck there would be very little chance of getting it from her without her knowledge. As she had told her nephew, Lucy was not scrupulous as to the modes she employed of gaining her object, for, in this case, she sincerely believed the end to be obtained justified the means taken to obtain it.

After some deliberation she finally decided on a plan for getting a view of the interior of the safe; but she did not confide it to Eric, who might possibly have objected to it on certain conscientious grounds which his aunt would have found some difficulty in combating.

CHAPTER XL.

MARY GOODE mentally anatomised the thickness of the door at Dering Castle, for it was owing to this circumstance that she was unable to overhear the conversation that took place between Evelyn Monkton and the doctor. When, however, the latter came out she waylaid him in the passage.

“Well?” he said, somewhat impatiently.

“I only wanted to take liberty of asking you whether there was going to be an inquest, sir,” she answered, meekly.

“Inquest—no! Why should there be?” was the irritable retort.

“I thought you were not quite satisfied as to Miss Fitzherbert's sudden death.”

“Then you had no business to think anything at all about it,” said Dr. Freeman, brusquely. “It is for me to decide on such a matter—not you.”

The nurse hung her head with real or pretended humility. Something had evidently upset the physician, and it was not a favourable opportunity for approaching him. She was a shrewd woman, and she determined to put off the communication she intended making until the next morning, when the doctor might perhaps be in a better state of mind for attending to her.

As she remained silent he turned away, but a sudden thought seemed to strike him, and he came back to her side.

“Why are you so anxious about the inquest?” he said. “I believe this is the second time you have spoken as if you thought one essential.”

Mary Goode lifted her large, dark eyes, and looked him full in the face. Her own was white, but instinct with earnestness.

“I do think it essential, sir, and I have a reason for thinking so.”

“What reason?”

“The fact that I believe Miss Fitzherbert's death was due to poison.”

She spoke the words quite steadily, and without faltering, while her gaze was riveted fixedly on his.

The doctor started back not only surprised, but horrified beyond expression at her words.

“Do you know what you are saying?” he asked, hoarsely.

“I know quite well what I am saying, and also its significance,” she observed, quietly.

“I am not making a reckless assertion without any foundation in fact, as I can readily convince you.”

“Do you mean you think she was poisoned by accident?”

“I do not.”

“Then it was by design?”

“Yes.”

“And do you suspect any person in particular of such an astounding and horrible crime?”

“I suspect her cousin, Miss Evelyn Monkton.”

The doctor took out his handkerchief and mopped his brow, on which great beads of perspiration had started. He was not an excitable man, and not imaginative either, but the accusation quite upset his mental equilibrium, for he had been singularly free during his professional career from those tragic incidents which chequer the lives of so many medical men.

If the speaker had been a different kind of woman he would have paid very little heed to the charge, which he would have set down to “hysteria,” or to the effects of the excitement following her young mistress's death. But Mary Goode was not the sort of person to give way to fancies, and he intuitively felt she was fearfully aware of the gravity of her words, and perhaps in a position to substantiate them.

“Come into this room, we cannot speak out here,” he said, when he had recovered in some degree his self-possession; and he led the way into the apartment nearest at hand—poor Hilda's dressing-room. “Now,” he continued, “tell me what grounds you have for supposing Miss Fitzherbert came to her death by unfair means?”

“Well, first of all, sir, I must confess that while the poor young lady was talking to her cousin last night I listened through the key-hole, which happens to be an extra large one.”

“What motive had you for doing that?” interrupted the doctor.

“Only the fact that I distrusted Miss Monkton, and did not want her to disturb my patient—well, and for another reason, too, which I will tell you by-and-by. If you remember you asked Miss Monkton what she and her cousin talked about, and she said it was of Miss Hilda's childhood and their strange meeting in London. Now, sir, that is a lie, for not one word was mentioned on either of those subjects. The truth is that Miss Hilda said she was going to make a will, leaving half her money to a charity, and the

other half to Miss Monkton. I could see the latter's face when her cousin made the announcement, and I declare to you, sir, there was murder in it!”

Mary Goode paused a moment in order to make her words more impressive, and the doctor shuddered, for there was a dramatic force both in her manner and sentences that unconsciously had a great effect on him.

“There was not much more said until Miss Evelyn burst into sobs and got very agitated,” continued the nurse. “When her cousin asked her the reason of her tears she made some vague answer, and then said it was time for the invalid to take her medicine. Miss Hilda made no reply, and the other went to the table where the bottle of medicine stood, and took up a glass. You will remember, sir, that the table stood behind the curtains of the bed, and was therefore invisible to the invalid, even supposing she had been watching the operation of having her medicine poured out, while it was in a straight line with the keyhole through which I was looking. I saw Miss Monkton take a small phial from her pocket and pour its contents into the bottle of medicine, which she shook up and then measured out of it the correct dose and gave it to Miss Fitzherbert.”

“But why did you not interfere to prevent the patient from taking the dose?” inquired Dr. Freeman, quickly.

Mary Goode looked slightly embarrassed, as if the question took her by surprise, but a moment later, and she recovered her self-possession.

“I did not know whether you might not have given Miss Monkton something to put in the medicine,” she replied, boldly; “and, indeed, the action was so sudden that I was entirely taken aback. It was not till afterwards that the idea of anything wrong struck me, and then I put the bottle away. I should mention there was only one more dose in it, and that, by good rights, should have been given to Miss Fitzherbert at bedtime, but instead of giving it her I opened a fresh bottle. Just before it was time for her to have it Miss Evelyn came in and said, ‘You can go downstairs to your supper, nurse, I will sit with my cousin and give her her medicine.’ I replied that I had had my supper, and just as I said this Miss Evelyn noticed the bottle of medicine, full. I did not see her face, for she had it turned from me, but she asked me how it was I had opened a fresh bottle. I told a story, and said you had made a little alteration in the fresh mixture which you had just sent, with instructions that I was not to give the patient any more of the old. She inquired where I had put the bottle, and I said downstairs in the cupboard in the butler's pantry.”

“And what did she say then?”

“Nothing. She stayed in the room a few minutes longer, and, when she left, went downstairs. I followed at a distance, and I saw her go into the butler's pantry; but I could not see what she did because she closed the door.”

“Why did you not send for me at once?” cried the doctor. “If you had done so—supposing that what you say is true—I might have saved Miss Fitzherbert's life!”

“As I tell you, sir, the idea did not strike me at once that it was poison, and when it did I was quite ready to administer remedies if I had seen any symptoms of poisoning. But Miss Fitzherbert was just the same as usual, and she slept so peacefully that I had no notion the end was near. The fact is, I was afraid of exceeding my province, and interfering where my interference was unnecessary. You must remember that in Miss Fitzherbert's absence Miss Monkton was mistress of the Castle, and it would have been a serious thing for me to bring an accusation against her.”

“It is a serious thing now,” replied Dr. Freeman, very much puzzled at those extraordinary revelations.

He thought the nurse was telling the truth,

and yet there was a discrepancy between the steady nerve she had shown in taking possession of the medicated draught and her remissness in not having sent for him immediately.

As a matter of fact, Mary Goode had thought far less of poor Hilda's life than of the task of vengeance on Evelyn Monkton, which had brought her to Dering Castle; but of this, of course, the physician was unaware.

"Then, as I understand the matter, you have part of the mixture into which Miss Monkton poured the phial?" he said, sorely exercised in mind as to what was his duty in these unprecedented circumstances.

"Yes, I locked it up in a drawer, so that I am sure it has not been tampered with since."

"I must have it analysed. You had better give it to me at once, and when the result of the analysis becomes known I shall be in a better position for forming an opinion. In the meantime I will telegraph to Mr. Fox (who would have had to be sent for in any case), and, as he is a lawyer, he will know what proceedings had better be taken. If," he added, as an afterthought, "Miss Monkton should attempt to leave the Castle you had better lose no time in communicating with me."

"You may trust me, sir," was Mary Goode's significant answer.

(To be continued.)

DAMP BEDS.—The *Lancet*, referring to the death of Mr. Maas, the well-known tenor, calls attention to the peril of sleeping in a damp bed. As a matter of fact, this peril is of the greatest, and it is almost ever-present. The experienced traveller rarely hazards the risk of sleeping between sheets, which are nearly sure to be damp, until they have been aired under his personal supervision at a fire in his bedroom. If this be impracticable, he wraps his rug around him, or pulls out the sheets and sleeps between the blankets—a disagreeable but very often prudent expedient. The direct mischief may result from the contact of an imperfectly heated body with sheets which retain moisture. The body heat is not sufficient to raise the temperature of the sheets to a safe point, and the result must be disastrous in the extreme if, as is sure to happen, the skin be cooled by contact with a surface colder than itself, and steadily abstracting heat all the night through. There is no excuse for the neglect of proper precaution to insure dry beds. Servants are never to be trusted in this matter, and the managers of hotels, even of the best description, are singularly careless in respect to it.

WATERPROOFING PAPER.—A new composition for waterproofing paper consists of the following ingredients, combined in the proportions stated, viz.:—Resin, 60 per cent.; paraffine, 45 per cent.; silicate of soda, 5 per cent. These ingredients are thoroughly mingled by heating them together, and by agitation. The paper to which the composition is applied is usually building or sheathing paper. The latter is taken in the condition in which it comes from the paper-machine, being quite dry. A strip or strips of the paper, from a roll or other convenient holder, are conducted and drawn through the tank of hot composition, whereby the paper becomes well saturated with it, and upon emerging from the tank the paper passes between suitable rolls, which press any surplus composition from it, leaving it hard and smooth. Sometimes the proportions of resin and of paraffine are varied from 5 to 15 per cent. from those stated, retaining about 5 per cent. of silicate of soda. Thus the proportions of resin and paraffine may vary between 50 and 65 per cent. of the former and between 45 and 30 of the latter, making a composition by which the paper is rendered waterproof and durable, when exposed to the weather, and by means of which a surface finish both smooth and hard is obtained.—*Paper Trade Journal*.

A FLOWER OF FATE.

CHAPTER IX.—(Continued.)

VERA made her way to the door, glad of the solitude. She wanted to think. Her wish was soon frustrated.

At the doorway stood her father. By his gait and the thickness of his voice Vera saw in an instant he had been drinking.

"Here you are, curse you, my fine lady," he growled. "What the devil do you mean by your insolence to my friends?"

Vera shrank back.

"Insolence, father?" she said, hurriedly, yet firmly. "I don't understand you."

"Oh, you don't, don't you?" sneered Mr. De Mortimer. "Well, I must teach you. The next time a gentleman offers you a present you will take it, if you please. No more d-d nonsense and stuck-up, grand airs; they don't pay with me, Miss Vera, as you will find out!"

Vera made no reply, she only shivered. The light of the dim lamp showed her face to be deathly white.

"Is this all you have to say?" she asked, at last.

"I shall have a good deal to say if you don't change your ways soon, I can tell you!" snarled her father. "You understand what I have said, I hope?"

"I have," answered the girl, quietly.

"Good; and next time see that you remember and obey me."

"No, father, in such a case I shall never obey you."

De Mortimer grasped the door-post, and tried to steady himself. He growled out an oath.

"You won't?" he said, roughly.

"I will not. How can you ask me to do such things, father?" cried Vera, suddenly and passionately. "Have you forgotten poor dear mother, and all her wise words? She taught me to hold my pride and honour above all things, and it is she I obey, not you."

"But I will make you obey me, you she devil?" shrieked De Mortimer, now mad with passion. "You can take gifts from men, after all, you mock good creature. There!"—he seized the flowers from her hand, and stamped upon them with his foot. "Now, another word from you, and I will treat you as I treat your precious flowers!"

"Strike me!" cried the girl, fearlessly, with cold, white lips. "Perhaps then you will end my life—a life I am sick of, a life whose shame nearly kills me!"

De Mortimer, infuriated by her words, lifted his arm, but before he could touch her it was seized in an iron grip from behind.

"Here! Who are you? Let me go!" cried the drunken bully, turning round wildly.

All the answer he got was a heavy lurch, a strong push, a blow, and he lay prostrate in the mud.

The victor stooped over him. He was stunned, more by drink than anything else, but there was no hurt. Then he went back to the doorway, where the girl stood silent and white as a statue.

"Take my arm," he said, courtly. "That cowardly brute will come to no hurt if he lies there all night."

Vera started, a blush crept over her face. It was Rex Darnley. All the misery of pain she had suffered, the anguish of love, and lastly the excitement brought about by her father's coarse cruelty reacted. She burst into tears.

Rex Darnley stood beside her quietly. He would have given all he possessed to draw her passionately to his heart; yet he checked himself. He had transgressed once, he would not again.

"I am very foolish," Vera murmured, as her flood of tears passed. "Thank you—oh! thank you for all you have done."

"I morely did what any man would do,"

Rex answered, almost coldly—the stress he put upon himself unconsciously stole his voice. "Now, will you permit me to see you home?"

Vera took his arm silently. All the fleeting joy called up at his presence vanished at his icy tones.

"Is it right to leave him there?" she asked, timidly, as they passed the prostrate form of De Mortimer.

"Yes," said Rex, briefly. "It will do him good; but he is coming to himself again. We had better get on."

"I did not see you come," Vera observed, as they walked on.

"I was strolling round the hall. I heard an angry voice, and reached the door just in time to stop the blow. I—it was merciful I was in time."

"I was not frightened," Vera said, slowly. "No; I heard your words. You wished for death. A strange wish for one so young as you, Miss De Mortimer. When a woman has all that you possess she usually prays for more life."

"Perhaps I am not as other women. Perhaps what is happiness to them is torture to me. Don't heed me, Mr. Darnley; I think sometimes I am mad!"

At the anguish in her voice Rex stopped. Another instant and the barrier would have been beaten down, once again the flood of his love must have poured forth; but it was not to be.

A man's form hurriedly approached them. "Oh! Miss De Mortimer, I am glad! Miss Delane was getting quite nervous. I came out to find you."

It was Tom Watson.

Rex released Vera's hand.

"You are safe now, Miss De Mortimer," he said, coldly. "Watson will see you the rest of the way. You leave to-morrow, I think, so this must be good-bye as well as good-night."

"Good-bye!" murmured Vera, faint as death. "Good-bye!"

She turned away with Tom Watson. Rex stood watching her slender form with a moody brow and a jealous, aching heart.

"Bah! I am a fool. That pretty boy comes before me. Well, it has been a brief wild dream. I must bury it in my past, and strive to forget as quickly as she will forget she ever saw me."

He little knew that at the very moment he was striding back to Beaconswood Vera had fallen in a dead faint on the doorstep of her humble home; that her lips had uttered one mute cry of love and despair for him ere they closed in unconsciousness; that her heart would ache with a dull, dead pain that nothing could ease—a pain that was her life-love for him.

CHAPTER X.

"WHAT a delightful idea of yours to give a ball, Sir Keith!" cried Lady Anice. "I consider you are the kindest person I know."

Sir Keith Moretown's handsome face flushed.

"I am glad you are pleased," he said, with a slight emphasis on the "you."

"I could not help being so; and another thing, Sir Keith, you must understand and I am so easily pleased; it is very silly of me, I suppose. I ought to be grown out of such childishness, but the thought of this ball quite excites me."

And Lady Anice looked up with a flush on her fair cheek, and her lips parted in a pretty babyish smile.

"You had one last week," Keith Moretown said, smiling down at her as he would at a child.

Lady Anice pouted.

"Oh, the county affair; that was very different to this, you know!"

Sir Keith could not help a thrill of pleasure at her innocent flattery.

"We must try and make it so, at any rate,"

he determined, quickly; "this hall will be spacious, that is one good thing."

"Indeed, yes!" and Lady Anice floated away a few steps in an impromptu valse.

"How I do love dancing!" she cried, gaily.

"Well, you get plenty of it, Anice," broke in the voice of Lord Dunmoor from a gallery that ran round the hall. "It seems to me you never do anything else."

"Brothers are always complimentary, you know, Sir Keith," Lady Anice turned, with a pretty air of deprecation, to her host. "I call that unkind."

"So do I," declared Sir Keith, hastily.

"Never mind, Lady Anice, we will take no notice of him; you shall dance as much as you like."

Lady Anice made a moue at her brother, and flitted over the oak floor beside Sir Keith's tall form.

"Is Moretown Hall very large?" she asked, as they made their way to the conservatories.

"It is larger than this, considerably."

There was a shade on Sir Keith's face as he spoke of his home.

"It is a queer, rambling place," he went on, half to himself; "and I love every stick and stone of it!"

"And yet you will not live there! You are an anomaly!" laughed Lady Anice.

"I was happy there, Lady Anice, in my childish days—so happy, that sometimes I am apt to think the boyhood of Keith Moretown must have developed into the manhood of some other being not myself. Then there came a blight, and then a sorrow that crushed all the gladness out of my young life."

"I know," breathed Lady Anice, softly.

"You mean the death of your poor, little sister."

Sir Keith nodded.

"Dunmoor has told me all about it," went on Lady Anice; "just as you told him all about that terrible night when your wicked stepmother treated you both so cruelly your father died and your baby sister was lost. I can assure you, Sir Keith, my blood has boiled many times over all you suffered then."

Lady Anice clenched her small hand.

"Such women ought to be killed," she declared, with flashing eyes, "they are not fit to live!"

"You are an angel," breathed Sir Keith, involuntarily; he was inexpressibly touched by her interest in him.

"But—was it certain the poor little thing really died?" asked Lady Anice, dropping her voice to softness again.

"She must have perished," Sir Keith replied, sadly. "I was delirious at the time, but although only a boy when I got off my bed of fever, I searched high and low for my darling little Madge. Oh! Lady Anice, if you had known her you would understand how awful it was. She was so sweet, so lovely! I had tended her, kept her as well as I could from all harm, remembering what my mother had said, and then to wake up one day and find her gone."

His voice grew agitated.

"We were such companions; we played together, worked together; she brought all her childish troubles to me, dear mite! Sometimes I fancy she may be alive; I am always trying to picture my Madge, grown from a baby to a lovely woman. Sometimes I see this wonderful likeness in some girl, and I start with hope to claim her, only to be disappointed. The other evening, when that operatic company was here, I could have sworn one of the actresses, a girl, young and gloriously handsome, was my dead sister. Alas! I soon found it was only another mistake of my brain; for her father was with her."

"Poor Sir Keith!" murmured Lady Anice, though her lips were compressed as he spoke of Vera. She hated the actress with all her small, spiteful heart for her beauty and her marvellous fascination.

"Ah! you are sympathetic," cried the young man, as they stood in the conservatory among the perfumed flowers. "You do not laugh at me for my folly."

"Laugh at you!" repeated Lady Anice, putting an intense tenderness in her voice and eyes; "no—no—I understand—I, too, love like you—my dear ones are my very existence."

Sir Keith, carried away by her sweetness, lifted her small hand to his lips.

"It is such women as you who make the world good, Lady Anice," he said, reverently.

"Now let us forget my stupid troubles and think of this ball. Do as you will, design, alter, order; if you have the smallest fancy only breath it to me, and if it is to be gratified it shall be done."

"Oh! Sir Keith," cried Lady Anice, clasping her hands together while her heart thrilled with genuine delight. The thought of power was happiness to her. "This is regal of you; but—are you not afraid to trust me? You don't know me well yet."

"I would trust you to the world's end," he murmured, passionately.

The man's whole brave, honest nature was becoming enthralled by this siren's false beauty. He was too true himself to dream that the soft cadences of her voice, the tenderness in her eyes, the gentle sympathy, the womanly pity, were all assumed, and for his benefit. No, Keith Moretown judged all men and women by his own standard, and to him Anice Druce was one of the fairest and sweetest of Heaven's creatures.

He had known her only a short week, but that seemed already a year of great, strange happiness. Little did he think that while she listened to his grave sayings, Lady Anice was telling herself that she would marry him, she must marry him. The Moretown estates were of fabulous value; Sir Keith's long minority under the careful hands of trustees had enriched the property to a tremendous extent, Lady Moretown would be one of the wealthiest wives in England.

Lady Anice had heard all this from her brother, but she was not content; she examined the peerage, and got at the exact truth herself. This done, she grew cool towards Lord Vivian, whose income was poverty compared to Sir Keith's, and would have turned her pretty back on Mr. Wenty Motte, also, had not that gentleman done the very same thing first, rushing off from Beaconswood in the train of handsome Maggie Delane.

The Earl felt momentarily piqued at first, but after two days he laughed good-naturedly at his folly, and watched dainty Lady Anice "go in" for Keith Moretown with much amusement, and it must be confessed a little feeling of pity for the young baronet. George Druce watched also with a decided sensation of wrath; he resented his good-natured chum being hauled into the clutches of those white avaricious hands, but he could do nothing.

When Sir Keith proposed to give a ball, he invited all the Beaconswood party to the Gill for the affair, and although the Countess was loth to accept the invitation, Lady Anice overruled her, and they came.

And for once it seemed as if Lady Anice was about to play a successful game. Sir Keith was growing more and more enraptured, and the majestic fortune he owned was just within her grasp.

She turned away from his passionate whisper with a lovely blush on her face.

"Well, then," she observed, "since you give me consent I will become the head. What do you say to a cotillion, Sir Keith?"

"A cotillion—certainly," he answered, at once.

"Oh, wouldn't it be great fun to have a masked ball? Oh, I do love 'bal masques'; everyone is so surprised when it is time to unmask!"

"You are queen of the revels," Sir Keith said, with a smile and a bow.

"Then a 'bal masque' it shall be; there need be no fuss, no delay; send up to a cos-

tumiers for dominos and masks, and we can wear our evening toilettes underneath. Will that do?"

"Excellently."

"Then run away at once and have the message sent to London, because all the people around must come masked, you know. No, you can't stay any longer with me, you must obey me. Go!"

Lady Anice pointed her small hand with a laughing gesture to the door. Sir Keith dropped on his knee in mock reverence; then, as he disappeared, she sank into one of the many fauteuils scattered about, and gave herself up to delicious reveries of the glorious future that lay before as Keith Moretown's wife. No kindly thought of him touched her mind; in truth, she regarded him with contempt. A man who could mourn for so many years the loss of a sister must be a weak, foolish creature, Lady Anice opined; fortunately she had no such sentiment in her nature; life would not be worth living if one gave way to regret and sorrow on all hands.

Footsteps sounded on the marble pavement, and looking up hurriedly Lady Anice saw her brother.

"Well," she said, impatiently. She could read his face, and she knew there was something Lord Dunmoor wished to say.

"Will you come to my room for a few minutes, Anice, or to your own, it does not matter which?" asked the young man, quietly.

"No," his sister replied, sharply; "if you have anything to say, say it out loud. I am listening."

"I prefer, as a rule, to discuss disagreeable subjects privately; but you have so little sense of natural pride, Anice, that as this matter concerns you entirely I will speak here."

Lord Dunmoor drew a letter from his pocket.

"Do you see this?"—he held it towards his sister.

"Yes," she, observed laconically.

"It is a lawyer's letter, telling me that proceedings are being instituted against me by Roderick of Paris for your extravagance. I suppose you thought I should submit to this, Anice, that once having given my name you would glide on serenely, leaving me to fight everything for you. You were mistaken. This letter came a few days ago; immediately on receiving it I wrote back to the lawyers and informed them that you were your own mistress, of proper age, and, moreover, possessed of an income on your own account; that neither your father, your mother, or myself would be responsible for your debts, and that it was you alone who could and must be sued. Consequent on this I received another letter, stating that Roderick would give you one more chance—would accept half the money if sent at once, but that if you ignored her as you have previously done, a writ would be issued immediately."

Lady Anice was very pale as her brother ceased; her hands were locked tight together.

"You call yourself my brother," she said, half crying with vexation and anger, "and yet do all this behind my back! You are horribly cruel, Dunmoor."

"No, I am just," Lord Dunmoor answered, promptly. "I have remonstrated till I am tired. I have paid already too many hundreds for you; it is you who are underhand. Why did you not tell me you had given me as your scapegoat to Roderick; it would have been more honourable, but as it is—"

"As it is," cried Lady Anice, jumping to her feet, and clasping her brother's arm, "dear Dunmoor, you will see to this for me. Yes, I was wrong, I know it; but then—"

Lord Dunmoor released his arm coldly.

"No, Anice," he said decidedly, "I wash my hands of the whole affair; you must learn what truth and honour means. Experience is the only master that will teach you."

Lady Anice produced her small cambric handkerchief and pressed it to her eyes, where no tears were! But she knew her brother well

—he might be just and highly-principled, but he was tender-hearted as a woman.

"Do help me, Dunmoor, do," she pleaded, her voice broken with pretended sobs.

Lord Dunmoor stood undecided.

"Nearly fifteen hundred pounds, Anice," he said, in a gentler voice; "where is it to come from? What have you done with your last quarter's remittance? I have not the means or the power to get you this money."

"A mortgage on one of the farms," murmured Lady Anice, still wiping her eyes.

Lord Dunmoor sighed.

"Poor old dad! Was it for this you worked so hard!" he said to himself—to his sister he was silent.

"Dunmoor," she said, suddenly coming nearer, and nestling her pretty head on his shoulder, "you will help me; think I am not the only one who has been extravagant, and I promise, I swear, I won't ask you again. I will try and make my income do. I will, indeed."

Lord Dunmoor moved uneasily; he was fond of his sister, though he knew her shallowness thoroughly.

"I must talk to mother," he said, after a pause.

Lady Anice sighed.

"Poor mamma," she breathed, "she has so many worries; need we trouble her about this?"

She feared the interview between her mother and Lord Dunmoor.

Lord Dunmoor's face softened.

"Ah! Anice, if you would always speak like this, if you would only show a little kindness and affection to our mother, it would make such a difference, dear, to her life. Think of all her anxieties and cares, of our poor father lying ill at home!"

"Lady Anice, with her face hidden on her brother's arm, made a *monse* of impatience. All this bored her exceedingly; but she was clever—she read the signs of wavering in Lord Dunmoor's manner, and she acted her best.

"I do, dear," she whispered. "Ah! I have been thoughtless and wicked; but Dunmoor, I will be different in future, and listen, dear. I think—I hope—"

She lifted her face, suffused with blushes.

Lord Dunmoor looked at her.

"You mean that Moretown will propose."

"I am sure of it; he has given me *carte blanche* about this ball; everything is put into my hands. I am queen of all, he says. That can only mean one thing."

"Well, Anice! if it comes about as you think I sincerely pray you may be happy, Keith is the best fellow on earth; don't play with him. He wouldn't understand it—it would break his heart."

"I could not do it," said Anice, with a little sigh; then she added,—

"You will help me, Dunmoor. If—if Sir Keith really intends to make me his wife, think what a difference it will be to me—nay, to us all; and if—"

"Dear, if Keith makes you his wife, well and good; all his wealth will be at your disposal, but not for us. Once you are married, Anice, our greatest care will be removed, for although you do not think it you are, and always have been, our first consideration. Now kiss me. I will arrange this matter for you; and, Anice, speak kindly to our mother, dear; her heart aches for love and sympathy from you, her only daughter."

"I will," cried Lady Anice fervently. She stood on tiptoe and kissed her brother, then waved her hand as he strode away.

"Oh! dear me, what a bore and a prig Dunmoor is! Well, Roderick is off my mind, thank goodness. I was growing decidedly uncomfortable about her wretched bill. Keith Moretown must propose—he shall! I must be his wife," she said to herself.

Sir Keith coming towards her quickly at this moment saw her fair brows knit and the little cambric handkerchief held in her hand.

"The message is despatched, Lady Anice,"

he said, breaking in on her musings; "but what is the matter?—you look distressed. Has anything happened?"

His tone was exquisitely tender.

Lady Anice put her handkerchief away with a sigh.

"Dunmoor has been talking to me—my poor father—"

"He is not worse?" asked Sir Keith eagerly.

Lady Anice shook her head.

"No, only as we were discussing business the thought of him lying helpless and ill at home suddenly came to me. It seems so wrong of me to be happy when he is so afflicted."

"You are happy?" murmured Sir Keith involuntarily.

"More happy than I have ever been in my life."

Lady Anice raised her eyes to his.

"Now," she cried, "to our work, we must have heaps of flowers, Sir Keith—perfect mountains. Oh! how busy I shall be!"

"You must not grow tired, or—"

Sir Keith stopped.

A man-servant had approached.

"Mr. Darnley has arrived, sir, and asks to see you."

Sir Keith uttered a pleased expression, which Lady Anice did not echo.

"I am so glad your cousin has arrived," declared Sir Keith; "will you excuse me while I go and see him?"

"Certainly," said Lady Anice; "I have heaps to do, so please go at once, but don't stop long."

The look accompanying these last words caused a thrill of delight to the young host; and as he hurried to Rex Darnley's room his pulses beat in a very tempest of glad anticipation.

It had transpired that Rex and Sir Keith were old friends; they had met abroad and travelled some weeks together on the Continent, Sir Keith using his mother's name, as he wished to enjoy his travels in peace and quietness; and if it had become generally known that the enormously wealthy young baronet had been in any particular hotel, he would have become besieged by mammas and their marriageable daughters. Rex Darnley, therefore, knew nothing when Lord Dunmoor spoke of his friend Moretown, and it was only, when Rex and Sir Keith had come face to face that they recognised one another.

"Well, old fellow, how are you? So glad you have come; began to fear you would not, after all!" welcomed Sir Keith, as he entered his guest's apartment.

"Thanks, Keith. I know you are glad to see me," Rex returned quietly, as he gripped his friend's hand. "By Jove! as Wenty would say, you are going to be very festive. A ball! What does Druce say?"

"Oh! he doesn't care, rather likes it. To tell you the honest truth, I don't see much of George; he's smitten with a girl in the neighbourhood, and is always riding over there."

"Got your house full?" queried Rex, as he settled his writing-table.

"All the Beaconsfold party."

"Vivian here?"

"Yes; that is, he was, but yesterday he left, said he had some business to transact at Abbey Chester. He is coming back to the ball, however."

There was a deep line on Rex Darnley's face.

"Abbey Chester," he repeated; "why, what can take Eric there?"

Sir Keith looked surprised.

"Perhaps his agent lives there," he observed. "Anyway, that's where he is gone, I know. Do you want anything, old chap? Ring if you do. You will find me in the hall, busy preparing for the 'bal masque' to-morrow night."

Rex nodded absently, and Sir Keith went out of the room.

Rex rose, unstrapped a bundle of newspapers and drew out one.

"Abbey Chester," he muttered; "I could not be mistaken; no, here it is. "Nathaniel De Mortimer's Operatic Company, gigantic success, magnificent triumphal progress, patronised by the Earl of Vivian and all the nobility. Miss Delane, Miss Vera De Mortimer, &c.," as large as life. The *Era* must be correct, and Eric has gone there. What can he have gone for?"

He threw down the paper and paced the floor, but the more he mused the deeper grew the lines in his face and the pain in his heart.

Abbey Chester was a big manufacturing town, surrounded by sentinels in the shape of furnaces and chimneys which at odd intervals vomited great clouds of thick, black smoke, tainting the air and darkening all the immediate neighbourhood with their greasy, sooty, touch.

Vera shuddered as the train, bearing the company, rolled through these furnaces. It seemed as if they cut off for ever all memory of Bentley, with its sweet, pure air, its trees tinted with their autumnal red and brown, its quaint village, and, last of all, its dream of short-lived happiness. She sat quietly looking out of the window. They had played three nights at a small town before coming on here, and Vera had sung and acted as in a dream. She heeded not Maggie's merry, kind voice, nor the growling oaths of her father; she only saw Rex Darnley's dark, handsome face as she had last seen it in their walk back to the lodgings.

If Mr. De Mortimer had the smallest idea of who his opponent was in the fierce, brief, struggle that night, he kept the knowledge to himself. Vera had fully expected to hear a torrent of abuse, and was surprised at her father's silence. Perhaps he was ashamed of his violence and his threats; it would be unlike his former character, still it might be so.

Vera was ever trying to root out the instinctive dislike and contempt for her father that would grow in her heart. Looking back to her childhood she had always shrunk from him at the sound of his voice or the touch of his hand. She would turn and cling to her mother's side—that poor, pale, sweet, patient, mother—who was as the angel of all that was perfect to the girl growing into womanhood.

Madame De Mortimer, as the play-bills styled her, was an actress; her voice was of a sweet, low, pathetic timbre, her artistic talents great. It was a theme of great wonderment in the profession how Emilie Laney, the pretty, piquante charming girl, had linked her lot with that of Nathaniel De Mortimer, scoundrel and blackleg. Immediately after their marriage the De Mortimers had set sail for India and Australia, where from time to time tidings reached their fellow-actors at home of the fabulous sums of money Emilie De Mortimer's talent was bringing to her husband. Then for awhile they were lost sight of. Then they appeared again, Madame De Mortimer grown into a prematurely old woman, worn with over-work, bad treatment, and illness.

Her one joy in life was her child Vera, who at once became the pet of the company wherever they went.

She was a strangely beautiful child, with wondrous eyes and deep red golden hair; there was no trace of Emilie Laney's brunette prettiness in this fair little creature, nor was there a suspicion anywhere that Vera belonged to Nathaniel De Mortimer. But that the child was Emilie's there could be no doubt. She adored her with more than a mother's common love, and in return Vera worshipped the woman. To all inquiries as to whether Vera was to be an actress, Madame De Mortimer would shudder, and declare that sooner would she see her darling in the grave.

Time passed; the mother, worn by illness, sank to the grave.

Vera never forgot the last week of her beloved protectress's life. Speech was impossible almost, she was so weak, yet the girl could

never rid her mind of the thought that her mother had some burden on her heart she wished to leave behind. Over and over again Vera caught an imploring look from the dying woman to her husband, but Nathaniel saw it not, and sat stolidly reading his paper and waiting till all was over.

Emilie died with her thin hand in Vera's, and the longing, wistful look in her eyes till the last; and when she was buried in a quiet village churchyard close to the cottage where she had lain till the last, Vera realised to the full all her mother had been.

Without a moment's hesitation De Mortimer put her on the stage; Vera pleaded, all to no avail—either that, or she must starve.

She was not frightened at the word starvation. She was a strange nature to meet in this century when all is false and unreal. The doctrines of her dead mother arose. He was her father, it was her duty to obey—she obeyed him.

Nathaniel rubbed his hands many times over the success of his plan. He foresaw from the first how great Vera's triumph must be properly worked, and as he sat in the train that carried him into Abbey Chester he felt he already held the end of the thread in his hand that would pull the money in.

"Vera, wrap up your throat," he commanded loudly, as they stood on the platform sorting the luggage; "this cursed fog is enough to kill anyone."

Vera obeyed silently.

"Ugh!" cried Maggie Delane, shivering. "What a beastly hole! I wonder where we shall find rooms, Vera? I expect we shall have to sleep in those chimneys; the place seems nothing else."

"We shall find some place," Vera said, thinking regretfully of Amy Watson and the sweet-smelling rooms they had left.

"Well, let us hope so. Oh!" Maggie uttered a loud exclamation and then grew rosy red. "Mr. Motte, where on earth did you spring from?"

"Been here an hour waiting for you, train came in wrong platform. By Jove! yes. Jolly glad to see you, Miss Delane, and you too, Miss De Mortimer—er. I say, thought perhaps you didn't know this beastly place so I—By Jove! let me carry that."

And Mr. Motte grasped a bag in either hand, and led the way to a brougham he had ordered.

"So you what?" asked Maggie, as she slipped her hand through his arm.

"So I just looked you out some rooms, and I took them. Hope you will forgive me, but, by Jove! you might have walked the town all night; upon my word, yes!"

"You are very kind to have taken so much trouble!" Vera said, warmly.

Maggie looked pleased.

"Yes, you are good," she added. "I say, Vera, this is better than tramping about in the fog."

"Glad you are pleased."

And Mr. Motte's face beamed with delight. "Couldn't possibly think of letting you walk about in this weather," he said, speaking to both, but looking at Maggie, who blushed again. "No, by Jove! no—not fit for a dog. Here we are. Not a bad situation considering the town, is it?"

"Indeed, no!" Vera said.

She could not help being touched by his kindness, and in her heart she thought she read him truly, that his devotion to Maggie was sincere and honourable. He was so frank that she felt there was no injury to their pride in accepting his kindness.

"Beautiful!" cried Maggie, "but," drawing back a little, "much too dear."

"Not a bit of it; you see—"

Maggie ran up the steps, and had a short parley with the landlady.

"Well," she said, as she came down again, "they are the very cheapest rooms we have ever had, Vera."

Mr. Motte whistled, and tried to look as if he had never seen the house or the landlady.

before. He assisted to get all their boxes into the hall, then prepared to take his leave.

"I say I must go now. I shall be in front to night. Er—Mrs. Landlady, please see that these ladies are comfortable; their health is public property. Yes, by Jove! Er—good-bye."

"*Au revoir*," said Vera, coming forward, and taking his outstretched hand, "and thank you again and again. Maggie, there is a good hour before we want tea. Wouldn't you like a stroll with Mr. Motte?"

"The very thing," cried Wenty, in delight. Maggie just stooped to kiss the flower-like face.

"By Jove, Miss De Mortimer!" cried Wenty, as Maggie disappeared to divest herself of her ulster, and settle her hat more comfortably on her pretty head, "you are a brick! I've been dying to see her, and so—to. Can you keep a secret?" he suddenly asked.

Vera smiled.

"Yes," she answered gravely.

"Then I am in love with Maggie."

"Is that all?" asked Vera, with another smile. "Why, I have known that these days past."

Mr. Motte stared.

"No, have you? By Jove! I thought I had kept it most beautifully to myself."

Vera laughed right out.

"Then, Miss Vera," he went on eagerly, "do you think she has seen? Do you think she likes me?"

"I am sure of that. She could not help it," Vera said, softly.

Mr. Motte looked radiant, then his face fell, and he sighed.

"She is so beautiful. Lots of chaps I know are raving about her. Do you think she would have me? I have a decent income, though it was made in soap, and—"

"Here she is!" Vera whispered; "ask her." Maggie came in singing. She glanced curiously from one to the other.

"Now what state secrets have you two been discussing?" she cried, gaily.

Vera only smiled, but to her astonishment, Wenty burst out suddenly with—

"I have been telling her I love you awfully. Yea, by Jove! I do, indeed, Maggie!"

"Well, I am sure."

And Maggie collapsed into a chair and grew rosy red.

"Yes, and I asked her if she thought you would have me, and she said she thought you would; and oh! Maggie, do say yes. I simply can't go on like this any longer; by Jove! no!"

"Say yes to what?" asked Maggie, in a low voice.

"To—will you be my wife?"

Maggie looked at him for an instant, then rose and walked to the window, and Vera saw her eyes were full of tears.

"Have you thought well?" she said, at last; "remember, I am an actress; my people are all mixed with the stage. I am poor. Thank Heaven, I am honest. Still, remember your people; they—"

"I haven't got any, and if I had I should not ask them," declared Wenty, stoutly. "No, by Jove, I wouldn't."

"But you are rich," went on Maggie, hurriedly; "I am very very poor. I am nobody, while your family—"

"Boiled soap. I don't see any difference; do you, Miss De Mortimer?"

But Vera had slipped away with a mist before her eyes and an ache in her heart. She did not envy Maggie, dear kind Maggie, who had been such a friend to her. No; but still she could not help contrasting her own lot with this other girl's. Maggie would have everything that love and money could give her, while she must live on toiling in a life that was hateful to her; lost to all that her nature craved for, the beautiful, the honest, the true. She sank down beside her bed and knelt there.

But she was not left long.

A quick step followed, and Maggie's arms were round her.

"Vera, I am so happy—so very happy," she whispered; "but I won't forget you, dear; you shall share in our happiness. I could not take it unless you did."

Vera rose, still imprisoned in Maggie's hold.

"Don't think me selfish, Maggie," she said, wistfully, "but, oh! at times I feel so wretched, I think my heart will break. But there dear, forgive me; I won't even let a cloud appear on the horizon of your joy. I saw it coming, and I think he is worthy of you, my true, dear friend. You deserve all the happiness you can get."

"Listen, Vera," Maggie whispered, "when—when Wenty and I are married, you shall just leave the stage and come and live with us."

Vera shook her head with a faint smile.

"There now, run away, Mr. Motte will grow impatient."

Maggie kissed her again, then tripped into the next room, and Vera soon heard the front door bang, proclaiming they were gone. She spent the hour of their walk in unpacking their numerous boxes and packages, and making the rooms as comfortable as possible, pushing most valiantly all regret and pain away.

Maggie returned alone, her face was radiant. She held out her hand to Vera, on the third finger glistering a lovely ring.

"He is so kind, so generous, so dear. Oh! Vera, won't the old people be glad? I can scarcely believe it. I keep fancying I shall wake up and find it all a dream."

"Just look at your left hand then," Vera said, laughingly; "and now, Miss Marguerite Delane, if you will condescend to things earthly, the meal awaits, and the overture will play in an hour."

So she chatted away, and, Maggie looking at her, told herself gladly that Vera was quite happy, little thinking that the gaiety was all assumed, to hide how aching Vera's heart was at the thought of her desolate lot.

The brougham was waiting for them when they descended the steps, and they drove to the theatre in luxury. Mr. Wentworth Motte certainly knew how his future wife should be treated.

Enflamed by the knowledge of the Earl's patronage, the inhabitants of Abbey Chester flocked in their dozens to see the "show." Mr. De Mortimer waxed more pompous, and equally he evinced a stronger desire to imbibe more liquor as his success was assured.

The piece was changed nightly, giving the artists plenty to do.

Mr. Motte demurred a little, and spoke of his ladylove leaving the company; but Maggie was too honest and business-like to agree. She had signed to the end of the tour, and she would keep to the letter of her bond; so Mr. Motte was forced to be content with surrounding her with all the luxury he could till the tour was ended.

Vera achieved another success.

As it happened, Abby Chester was crammed with a number of scientific men, called together by a congress; and tempted by the names of the various operas performed by Mr. Nathaniel De Mortimer's Company many of them came to witness the performance, and one and all fell in love with Vera.

On the third night, as she was passing from the wing to her room, she heard her name called softly.

"Miss De Mortimer."

She turned; there beside her, looking wonderfully handsome in his immaculate evening dress, with some costly flowers in his hand, stood Eric Lord Vivian.

"My lord!" she exclaimed, in surprise.

"Yes, it is I," the Earl said, smiling at her astonishment. "I have been in front; you look as if you thought I had dropped from the clouds."

"You startled me," Vera murmured, her heart throbbing painfully. Unconsciously her eyes wandered over the Earl's shoulder to find that other face which had met hers thus, so



[VERA TWINKED. THESE BESIDE HER, LOOKING WONDERFULLY HANDSOME, STOOD ERIC LORD VIVIAN.]

often before. "Have you come to stay in Abbey Chester, my lord?"

The Earl laughed a little confusedly.

"Well, that all depends," he said; "but you have not said you are glad to see me, and look! I have brought you some flowers."

Vera took them.

"They are very beautiful!" she said, simply. "Thank you very much."

"Won't you say you are glad to see me?" pleaded Lord Vivian.

Vera hastily put her flowers down on a chair.

"That is my cue, my lord," she said, hurriedly; and the next instant she was on the stage again.

The Earl sighed a little vexedly, then, feeling a touch on his shoulder, he turned.

"Ah! De Mortimer," he said.

"Your lordship's humble servant," Nathaniel bowed low.

He was attired as a heavy father, and in a white wig, with heavy white monstaches covering his coarse mouth, he looked almost handsome.

"I am delighted to see you, my lord."

The Earl nodded; he was listening to Vera's sweet voice.

"Have you managed that, may I ask, my lord?" asked Mr. De Mortimer, sinking his tones to a confidential whisper.

The Earl turned.

"Yes."

"And he will come?"

"Yes," said the Earl again.

"When?"

"To-morrow night."

Nathaniel De Mortimer rubbed his hands softly with glee, and his eyes glistened.

"I am deeply obliged to you, my lord," he said, promptly. "You have given my child a footing on the first rung of the ladder. It will be her own fault now if she doesn't mount to the top in two twinkles."

"I sincerely hope so," the Earl said, quietly. "I suppose Robinson is the best man to have asked?"

"The very best, the very best," assented Vera's father. "As manager of the 'Thespia' he is the one and only person to have asked, I shall take care she is at her best to-morrow night, and unless I am a Dutchman she will get the offer of an engagement at the 'Thespia' before she can turn round, my lord; and all through you. You will have been her benefactor."

"Indeed, what I have done is little; but I sincerely trust it may be beneficial to your daughter. I never heard so rarely sweet a voice."

"Pure in every note, like a nightingale; sings with feeling too. What! my cue! Will your lordship pardon me; we will continue our conversation at—"

And Mr. De Mortimer vanished.

The Earl stood on watching as well as he could the slender form flitting about on the stage, while his breast was filled with a mass of troubled thoughts.

Had he done wisely and right in using his influence and bringing this London manager down to see the girl? And was it after all, only interest in her artistic career that led him to work on her behalf. Was it not rather a feeling of something dangerously akin to pity for this refined lovely being that filled the heart of Eric Earl of Vivian?

(To be continued.)

A METHOD OF CLEANING STONEWORK.—It is sometimes required to clean the surface of old masonry that has become weathered or coated by deposits from dirty water, either for the sake of appearance or to make a sound connection with new work. The only effectual method hitherto practised for this purpose has

been by completely re-dressing the surface with the chisel—a method which is tedious and costly at best, and which is seldom thoroughly carried out. A different and, it is claimed, more satisfactory process was devised by M. De Liebhafert, and used in 1884 for cleaning the walls of the quays of the Seine in Paris. These walls become in a few years covered with a shiny black deposit, which resists acids. To remove it a paste composed of a solution of soda and lime, to which a little chloride of lime is added, was mixed to the consistency of honey, and spread over the surface, where it was allowed to remain for two or three hours, according to the condition of the stone. When it was removed the deposit was still black; but it had become sensitive to acids. After this preliminary treatment a workman passed over the surface (with a large gutta serena brush) a mixture called sulpho-chlorhydric, forming on the stone a kind of glue; and almost immediately afterwards he syringed the surface with a jet of the same liquid. It formed an adherent paste, continuing to act upon the stone for about two or three hours. After the syringe came a gang of men who scrubbed the surface, finishing off with a hose pipe. The sulpho-chlorhydric mixture is composed of sulphuric and hydrochloric acids mixed empirically according to the nature of the stone and the necessities of the case. The cost of cleaning stone walls by this method in Paris is 0.46 franc per square metre for material and 0.50 franc for labour, by contract. The preliminary treatment by the caustic paste was paid for separately at 0.50 franc per square metre. It is said that the stone itself is not damaged by this treatment, and soon regains its natural colour.

WHAT an enigma is man! What a strange, chaotic, and contradictory being! Judge of all things, feeble earth-worm, depository of the truth, mass of uncertainty, glory and butt of the universe, incomprehensible monster!



["ALLOW ME," AND THE BASKET WAS ON HIS ARM IN A MOMENT. "ARE YOU FOND OF FERNS, MISS NANCY?"]

NOVELETT J

NANCY'S SETTLEMENT.

—O—

CHAPTER I.

My name is Nancy, and I have red hair. I mention these facts first in my history because they formed the chief troubles of my childish years. Either of them would have been enough to bear, but the two together were overwhelming. One could not have been helped, the other might have been avoided; therefore being called Nancy has always affected me more than the other calamity; besides, who knew—so I used to buoy myself up with hope—my hair might change some day to a fashionable auburn? My name couldn't alter! I must grow into a "come out" young lady, still ticketed by the homely appellation of Nancy.

We were not rich. Had we been so one of my misfortunes—not the red hair—might have been spared me; but in point of fact we were in those circumstances known as genteel poverty, when the utmost tugging and dragging at both ends is needful if they are anyhow to meet.

Mother tugged and pulled energetically, but somehow there always seemed a little gap between those horrid ends, and so you clearly perceive we were not in a position to slight the advances of any rich friends we might possess.

Our stock of this commodity was—like our income—strictly limited, but at the time of my birth my mother did boast one wealthy acquaintance, whose name was spoken in tones of an inspiring respect by my elder brethren and their parents.

The Lady Anne Beaumont had been at school with mother; even there the friendship had been unequal, for one had been a parlour boarder, the other an articulated pupil, but they had loved each other; and when Lady Anne

married a baronet and mother a country doctor, wide apart as was their fortune the old intimacy never quite died out, and when the Beaumonts were at Beaumont Hall in the autumn, Lady Anne always drove her ponies over once or twice to see my mother.

It must have been on one of these visits that my advent was foretold to her. I have heard the story so often that I almost feel as if I had been there and witnessed the scene myself.

"Another baby, Susan!" and my lady threw up her daintily-gloved hands in dismayed surprise. "Why you have seven children already!"

"Yes," replied mother, meekly, she was always gentle, "this will be the eighth."

"I should have thought one for every day in the week was sufficient," said my lady, sharply, "with your small means, too."

My mother sighed. Eight children and a limited income do not harmonise well together.

Lady Anne, who was generous-minded, if a little hard in word, bade her cheer up.

"This shall be my child," she said, kindly. "If it's a girl you shall call it Nancy, if a boy, Beaumont; and, provided it's pretty, I will take all the expense off your hands. The boy shall have a college education, or the girl a pretty little portion. You know Sir John is liberality itself to me, and I have all my own fortune. We have no one to save for, and it will be an amusement and interest to me to feel I have a share in number eight."

This proposal was afterwards communicated to my father. It was repeated many times, and made as it was in all generosity, and so delicately, that no feelings could be injured, what could my parents do but accept, thankful that one child out of their quiver-full was provided for.

There were no children at Beaumont Hall. Lady Anne had been an heiress, Sir John was

enormously rich. Although my mother's friend only spoke of education or marriage portion, my mother had fond dreams of seeing number eight the adopted heir—or heiress—of the Beaumonts.

Only one scruple troubled her, the whole proposal had been based on one condition—if the child were pretty.

"Babies are so seldom pretty," said my mother, deprecatingly, "except to those who love them."

This was suggested at Lady Anne's last visit before she went abroad with her husband for the winter.

"All your children are pretty," said my lady, gently. "They have all got your beauty or their father's dark hair and thoughtful eyes. By the time I come back the new baby will be six months old and quite presentable."

My mother flushed.

"But if it shouldn't be pretty?" she persisted.

"I will wait in hope. I can bear anything, Susan, except red hair. I have a positive horror of red hair, and I couldn't take the slightest interest in any child afflicted with it."

My mother's hair was chestnut-brown, golden in the sunlight, my father's black, and these two colours were reproduced in their children. There was not even one of our kindred with red hair, so my parents felt tolerably safe.

I was born about six weeks after Lady Anne went abroad, and they christened me Nancy, a neighbour standing proxy for my noble godmother. I was the fairest baby my mother had ever had, and for the first months of my life received—they say—unlimited admiration. Gorgeous presents arrived from Lady Anne of everything a baby could want, and a great many things it could not. I bid fair to be the most notorious member of the family until, to my mother's delight, soft down

began to grow upon my bald head, and, alas! suddenly the awful knowledge dawned upon my family that I had red hair!

I don't know how they conveyed the knowledge to Lady Anna. I don't know what she said, but of course she withdrew her patronage from my unconscious self. Sir John died soon after, and Beaumont Hall passed to a stranger. By the time I can remember things clearly my mother's friend had become nothing but a memory and a name.

I suppose I picked up my own story as soon as I could pick up anything, for I never remember hearing it for the first time. I was familiar with it, it seems to me, as with my mother's voice. Of course I cannot recall my sudden descent from being a very influential baby to becoming a very unwanted one; but I did know this, that ever since I could remember I had been one too many in the family.

My next sister, one year above me, was a beauty, and the one before her a genius; my last remaining one, the eldest of the whole family, was great at housekeeping and domestic matters. My three sisters had each their vocations in life. I had none, unless we can count that of being invariably in other people's way.

My seniors paired off together, as children will in large families. Patty was my mother's right-hand companion; she always seemed to belong more to the seniors than to us. John, my eldest brother, and William, the second, were inseparable. Bob, who had a scientific turn, of course paired with Thekla, the genius, while the twins, Claude and Claudia, never required any sympathy and companionship but each other's. I was the outsider, the *one de trop*—the solitary ugly duckling in a very fine brood of swans.

"They might have forgiven me by this time," I used to think sadly to myself. "Sixteen years is a long while to bear malice, and, after all, it was not my fault. How could I help having red hair? And, besides, if mother knew all that depended on it she ought to have dyed it as soon as it began to sprout, and she saw it was the wrong colour."

We lived in Rhymington. My father had the best practice in the place (the best was far from superlative), and from that circumstance, perhaps, we were usually spoken of as the "Doctor's daughters." We lived in a large, red brick house, just out of the town; an ugly, barn-like sort of place, and yet we all loved it. It was our home to which mother had come as a bride, and where we had all been born.

Still, as the time went on, and there were weddings among our friends and acquaintances, I think the idea would come to us that one of our four girls could be spared, and that a new house to visit at, a new brother, and a new bridesmaid's dress, would all be very agreeable varieties in our everyday life. We never put this into words, but I am sure we all thought it, and in our heart of hearts had selected either Thekla or Claudia for the honour of making the first marriage in the family.

Scene, a bright June morning, and we girls gathered in a pretty room known as the porch-parlour. I call it pretty, because it opened into the large, old-fashioned garden, and the porch was covered with climbing roses and woodbine, and because it was such a quaint room—all gables, and the sun danced so pleasantly in at the many windows; but I doubt if anyone else would have found much to admire in our favourite sanctum.

The carpet—new for our father's marriage—had seen such long service that none of us lower down in the family than Thekla could claim to have seen the pattern, though we all accepted the legend that it had been composed of roses and acorns, and was mightily gay and cheerful. I can only say that now all colour had fled, and it bore the marks of careful mending, besides being so threadbare in many places that, but for the honour of the thing (as the Irishman is reported to have said when he was offered a rest in a seatless

sedan-chair), we might as well have had bare boards.

Well, there we were, on this glad June morning, all four of us; Patty, our eldest, blooming, fresh-coloured, and cheerful, with her black hair gathered in a large knot at the back of her head, and her pink cotton gown trying to give itself a jaunty air, as though its colour (like the carpet's, only not from the same cause) was not fast vanishing under too frequent visits to the wash-tub.

We were all proud of our eldest; she was such a keen, practical-minded young woman, such a splendid manager, such a head for accounts! Our only wonder was that some young man of the neighbourhood had not long ago discovered Patty's sterling qualities, and removed her to a sphere where they would benefit him instead of us. Perhaps the young men forbore, thinking we could not get on without her, but we were not selfish; we would honestly have tried.

From Patty to Thekla came a gap of five years (filled by two brothers). Our genius was not very pretty, but she had a distinguished air, or we thought so, which imparted an aristocratic appearance even to faded blue cotton; but our pride was reserved for Claudia. We made a good beginning as a family with Patty, but we surprised ourselves in Claudia. There we ought to have stopped, certain nothing could excel that piece of blue-eyed perfection. Alas! as you know already, Claudia was not the last flower in our family garden; there was another, a weed, though, rather than a flower, the most utter and complete failure.

"I've got some news for you, girls."

We all looked up. If there was admiration with which we habitually regarded Patty could have been increased I am sure it would have been so by this address. Thekla dropped her dictionary (she was always digging in it for German words), Claudia put down the bonnet she was trimming for mother, even I took a fresh stocking out of the huge basketful at my feet a little more hopefully than usual, and we all looked anxiously and expectantly at Patty.

"What is it?" from Thekla, who was concise in speech, an admirable quality.

"Do make haste and tell us," pleaded Claudia, the spoilt one of the family. "I am dying to know what it can possibly be, and even Nancy looks interested."

Nancy was interested, but she had the good luck not to say so, or she might have been sent summarily out of the room. Though only a year younger than Claudia I was always made to feel that I stood on a far lower level than any of my sisters.

"Sir Alaric Beaumont is coming home."

We gasped. I am quite sure the magnitude of the effect produced upon us by her news exceeded even Patty's expectations.

Ever since Sir John's death, that is for almost sixteen years, the Hall had been shut up. It passed to a distant cousin, a confirmed invalid, whose ailments demanded a foreign residence. He enjoyed the baronetcy about twelve years, and then shuffled off this mortal coil to make room for a nephew—none other than the Sir Alaric whose return was now proclaimed to us.

The county generally knew nothing of Sir Alaric; his name in the baronetage, and the date of his birth comprised their information. He must now be not very far from thirty. He was unmarried, and had lingered four years before he came to take possession of his heritage. This was all we knew.

"It won't make much difference to us," I said, defiantly; "the Hall is a good seven miles from Rhymington."

"It will make all the difference in the world," returned Patty. "Of course father will call and tell Sir Alaric of Lady Anna's friendship for mother, and then he will come here and be quite intimate with us."

I made a face.

"I don't suppose he ever heard of Lady

Anna, and as to being intimate here, how could we manage to entertain a baronet?"

"Very easily; there is the lawn-tennis court, and Claudia's singing, not to speak of mother's conversation. I don't suppose Sir Alaric would find a more attractive family in the county."

"Especially in the matter of carpets."

This was an unlucky speech; Patty promptly administered a snub.

"Considering whose fault it is we are so poor I think the least you can do, Nancy, is not to remark upon it."

"Whose fault is it, then?"

"Yours, of course; if you had only not had red hair, and hopelessly offended Lady Anna."

"I can't help my hair, and besides," and I speak spitefully, for I am decidedly out of temper, "if I had been as fair as Claudia Lady Anna would hardly have recarpeted Prospect House; it was I she undertook to provide for, not my family."

I have put my foot in it now most certainly. Patty looks at me scornfully, Claudia shrugs her shoulders. Thekla, who is good at arithmetic as at other things, says coolly—

"Considering our parents have been at the cost of maintaining, clothing, and educating you for over sixteen years, Nancy, I wonder you dare to speak so. The money that has been lavished on you for half the time would have provided new carpets for every room in the house, and refurnished it from top to bottom."

I feel I should like to ask what money has been lavished on me, except in the matter of boots and shoes. I never have a particle of clothing that has not first seen much wear in my sisters' service, I am about to exclaim, when a mortifying recollection kept me silent.

Putting aside clothing, I have been fed—I cannot deny that for sixteen years or so I have added largely to the family baker's bill, being endowed by nature with a healthy appetite.

I look a trifle shamefaced; but my sisters, having "put me down," return to the more agreeable subject of Sir Alaric.

"He is certain to marry," says Patty, composedly. "He could not live in that grand old rambling house by himself."

"Sir John never lived in it, though he was married," I interpose, not having the prudence to hold my tongue after my late rebuff.

"Sir John was far richer than Sir Alaric," said Thekla, coldly. "He had a large private fortune, which he left to his wife. Sir Alaric has nothing but the estate and its revenues."

"Five thousand a year."

Our father's income had never yet reached five hundred, so his daughters may be pardoned if Sir Alaric seemed to them as rich as Croesus.

"It would be so nice for one of us to be settled," said Patty, complacently. "I do hate those letters mother gets from Aunt Nora, always asking if none of us are engaged. I feel sometimes I long to write and say 'yes,' and then six months after, when she begins to be curious about the wedding, to send a note to say the match is broken off."

"Aunt Nora is rich."

"Is she?" asked Thekla. "Why doesn't she ever come to see us, Patty?"

"She married a widower, and I think there is something queer about his daughter; either she is deformed, or quite an invalid or something. Aunt Nora and mother have not met for more than twenty years. You see, aunt married for money, and thought mother made a bad match."

"A bad match! She ought to be ashamed of herself. Fancy calling the dear old pater a bad match!"

This from me, who possess a most trying faculty of speaking where it would wiser to keep silence.

Thekla turns to me scornfully.

"You need not think of such things—a mere child like you."

"I was seventeen yesterday."

For more than sixteen years and a-half had run their course since I defeated the hopes of my family by the discovery that my first look was of an unmistakably reddish hue.

"You'll never make a match at all—good, bad, or indifferent, Nancy," said Claudia, rather pityingly than otherwise. "You were just out out for a maiden aunt, always busy with a stocking basket."

"I shouldn't darn stockings if I could help it, only you all leave me yours to do."

"It's the rightful privilege of the youngest."

"Then you ought to be very thankful for my existence, Claudia, or it would fall to your lot."

"So it would," and our beauty laughed good-humouredly. "Well, Nancy, in consideration of that fact, if I marry Sir Alario you shall be one of my bridesmaids I promise you."

"Why should you marry him? Patty and Theckla are both older."

"Age is not everything," returned our beauty. "In fact, it is rather a disadvantage than otherwise in the race matrimonial."

Theckla smiled. She and Claudia never clashed; in fact their roles were so different there was little fear of it.

"You have not exhausted my news yet, girls," said Patty, benignly. "Guess again."

But we couldn't, just the bare fact of Sir Alario's return had taken away our breath. We really were not equal to any more excitement, and Patty had to be merciful and let us off the arduous task of guessing.

"Mr. Pemberton's substitute is chosen."

Mr. Pemberton was my father's assistant—a young man with a large appetite, and a shock of stubbly black hair.

When he first came to Rhymington and to Prospect House (where he boarded as one of the family, in consideration of a strictly moderate salary) we girls had fancied one of us was his destiny; and though he was too young for Patty, and far too ugly for the beauty, we had felt magnanimously that we might, perhaps, give him Theckla and her genius; but our generosity was never put to the test. David Pemberton perversely fell in love with our greatest friend, Mary Graeme, and he was going to marry her some day.

We rather grudged him to Mary, specially when his name appeared in one of the papers—a summons to him in the agony column to go and hear something to his advantage.

There was some little flaw in the matter, some witness who had to be hunted up from America to prove Mr. Pemberton's claim to ten thousand pounds. Good, honest David determined to go and hunt up the witness himself.

He would provide a substitute to take his work for three months. At the end of that time he would either return meekly to us, somewhat out of pocket, or else be in a position to buy a practice for himself and marry Mary (lucky girl) at once.

The question of the substitute had interested us very much, but now it faded into nothing by the side of the news of Sir Alario's return.

"Who is he?" asked our beauty, languidly enough. "Fifty, I suppose, with goggle eyes and blue spectacles. David Pemberton never had a good-looking friend yet, and most of his cronies are well advanced in years."

David had been with us eighteen months, and although he had not fallen in love with any one of us (perhaps specially for that reason) he was on very friendly terms with the whole family.

"His name is John Carruthers," went on Patty, benevolently; "and he is eight-and-twenty."

"And just like David?"

"David does not know him; he is just the result of an advertisement."

"Oh!"

"I suppose his testimonials are all right?"

"Excellent! Papa is delighted."

"And he will live with us?"

"Of course."

"Eight-and-twenty, four years older than David."

"When is he coming?"

"This evening."

"We all started."

"Really?"

"Yes; David will be glad of a day or two in London, so Mr. Carruthers is coming at once."

"I wonder what he will be like?"

"You will soon know; father wants the gig to go to Cheveleigh, but mother is to borrow the Vicarage pony carriage and go and meet him."

"It's my turn to drive mother," said Claudia, breathlessly, "I'm sure it is."

"It's mine," said Theckla; "you're never fair, Claudia; you get two drives to my one."

"Or my none," I put in, quietly.

"You're such a child," said Patty; "you don't count. Now, girls, don't quarrel; I must stay at home to see to tea, and there will be room for three besides Mr. Carruthers, so you can both go."

I looked so disconsolate that Patty (who never snubbed me quite so much as the others did) actually spared a kind word for me.

"You might go over to the common, Nancy, and dig up the fern you want for your rookery. It won't be too hot this afternoon, and as I shall be at home you can easily be spared."

I thanked her rapturously. There were few things I loved better than a solitary expedition fern-hunting. Some lovely specimens grew in the woods beyond Rhymington-common, but none of my sisters cared to walk so far; and, being the family Cinderella, there was often a little difficulty about my being spared.

I set off directly after lunch, happy in the knowledge nothing was required of me at home till seven o'clock, when "clothed and in my right mind" I must join my elders at high tea.

Truth requires me to confess I looked somewhat of a rustic as I walked towards the common. I had put on my shabbiest garments, and as my best were not magnificent the result was not prepossessing; just a striped cotton gown (once Patty's, and, consequently, rather too capacious for my spare figure), fastened in at the waist by a leather band, a pair of my father's thick driving gloves to protect my fingers from nettles, and a huge muslin-trimmed hat, known in the family as "Nancy's umbrella."

I knew I was ugly; the fact had been dinned into my ears so often I could hardly fail to remember it; but though I should never have had the courage to claim even so much for myself I did believe nature had given me one good thing—a fair, creamy skin, and I protected it zealously from freckles and tan. I was not vain of it. Patty called it "sickly," and Theckla said it was bilious, but such as it was I approved of it more than any other part of my outer self, and protected it accordingly. For the rest I was short and thin, much the smallest of the rest of the family. My hair had a fluffy, wavy twist, which no amount of brushing would reduce to smoothness, and my eyes were green, unmistakably green, though their colour was relieved by dark brown lashes and brows.

I reached the common without let and hindrance. I filled my basket with fern-roots and wild flowers, and then sat down on a mossy stone to rest, very glad I had more than an hour to stay in that peaceful spot before I need think of returning to Rhymington.

My umbrella hat somewhat obscured my vision, and so I had no idea my solitude was to be disturbed till I heard a voice close beside me asking—

"Can you tell me the way to Rhymington, if you please?"

I started and looked up. A young man

stood up before me—an utter stranger, dressed in a morning suit of tweed, with dark hair, blue eyes, and a thoughtful, kindly face.

"It is more than two miles from Rhymington—the town, I mean."

"Is it? I am going to Prospect House—Dr. Beresford's. The porter said it was 'not very far,' but I seemed to have walked a long way."

"Where did you come from?"

He seemed surprised at this point-blank question, but answered frankly,—

"New Rhymington. I seem to have made a muddle of the journey. I took my ticket to Rhymington right enough, and I don't doubt my luggage has gone there; but when I saw the name on the board at the platform I thought I must have reached my destination. Not till the train had gone did I see a tiny 'New' stuck just above the Rhymington."

"Prospect House is five miles from New Rhymington, and about two miles from the old station."

"Well, I am a good walker," philosophically, "and I daresay I shall get there in time if you will be so kind as to direct me."

"I am going there myself presently; but what a pity you made the mistake? Mother has driven over to meet you."

"Has she? I am very sorry to have given her the trouble. Then you are Miss Beresford?"

"I am not!" I cried, aggressively, for somehow, though Patty is so much worthier and more admirable, so much more popular and loved than I am, at seventeen one does not like the idea of being taken for six-and-twenty. "Patty is at home, and the other two have gone with mamma to meet you—that is, if you are Mr. Carruthers?"

"John Carruthers, at your service, Miss— He hesitated so long I was forced to supply the missing word, though I made my voice as depressed as possible.

"Nancy."

"Nancy. Were you really christened that, or is it a corruption of Anne?"

"I was christened so, worse luck."

"It is my favourite name."

"It is?" a little hopefully. "Are you quite sure?"

"Positive. I had a little sister once, and she was called Nancy. I have never heard the name since I lost her."

I almost liked him. In all my life before no one had admired my cognomen. Some went so far as to call it a "good, honest English name," but until to-day I had never heard it praised.

"Was she very pretty?" I asked, eagerly, wanting to know if that other Nancy had anything to compensate her for her name.

"Very."

My interest in her ceased at once. She has not a fellow sufferer with me.

"We had better go now," I said, doggedly, beginning to collect my trophies.

"Allow me," and the basket was on his arm in a moment. "Are you fond of ferns, Miss Nancy?"

"Very. I am making a rookery at the bottom of the garden."

"You must let me help you. I used to be good at gardening."

I shook my head.

"Why not?"

"You'll never have any time. David never had."

"Mr. Pemberton? Were his duties as your father's assistant so very arduous as to leave him no leisure?"

"He was always reading for an examination. As soon as he had struggled through one he had to begin another; and then, since Christmas, you know, there has been Mary."

My companion smiled.

"I have passed all my examinations, Miss Nancy, and I don't know a lady, so I think I shall have plenty of time for gardening, if you will accept my help."

"Oh! thank you. You see we can't afford a gardener. Mother wanted the garden just to go, except the tennis court; but I am so

fond of flowers, I begged her to let me see to it, and I think it looks pretty well."

"And you do it all alone? I thought you had brothers?"

"Four, but they are all away from home. John is a clergyman, and Will is trying to be one; Bob is to be a great chymist, and Claude has gone to sea."

"You must miss them very much?"

"The others do."

"Don't you?"

"They never took any notice of me; you see I was a failure."

"In what respect?"

"I'd rather not tell you, you are sure to hear it soon enough—it was something I did more than sixteen years ago."

Mr. Carruthers was laughing hopelessly. I looked considerably annoyed.

"I'm very sorry," he said, penitently; "but how can I help it if you will talk of what you did more than sixteen years ago. Why, if you were alive at all then, you must have been a baby in long clothes."

"I was just short-coated; but please don't talk about it, you'll hear it soon enough."

He changed the subject at once by pointing to some white stone turrets just visible in the distance, and asking me if that were Beaumont Hall.

"Yes."

"I have a kind of interest in it, because you see I have known Alaric Beaumont a good many years."

"Known Sir Alaric?"

"He wasn't Sir Alaric when I first knew him, and had little chance of being so; the last baronet had sons of his own, and a feud with his brother made young Alaric a total stranger to him. The lad was as poor as a church mouse until he came into the baronetcy, which surprised him more than anyone else, as he never happened to hear of the accident which killed Sir Fulke's boys."

"I thought Sir Fulke was a bachelor?"

"Most of the outer world thought so; his was a private marriage with his cook."

"How dreadful!"

"It might have been worse if Alaric had been brought up to think himself the heir, and then the cook's sons intervened. He won't make a worse baronet, Miss Nancy, for having known a sharp taste of poverty."

"He will be much wiser."

"Why?"

"People get so dictatorial when they have always been rich."

"Then you don't care for money?"

"I think I should like to be rich for a day, just to see what it felt like."

"Perhaps you will know some day."

"I don't think so. Papa is getting old, and he was never pushing; the boys may make fortunes, but that won't matter to me."

"Why not?"

"They will marry."

"Will they? Miss Nancy, riches are a heavy responsibility; believe me you are better off far without them."

"I daresay. I should like a thousand pounds—I don't want any more."

"What would you do with it?"

"I should pay mother back."

"Pay her back; what can you mean?"

"I should pay her for all I have cost. I should think fifty pounds a year would be enough; seventeen fifties are eight hundred and fifty."

"And what would you do with the balance?"

"Go to Australia."

"Alone?"

"Of course."

"But why expatriate yourself?"

"I am not in the least clever. I couldn't paint or draw or do fancy work, but I am very quick at mending and making; and I have a real taste for cooking and housework. I read the other day that able-bodied women, skilful in domestic duties, were greatly needed in Sydney. Now I am quite sure I am able-bodied, and I think I am skilful in domestic duties."

Mr. Carruthers' mirth was excessive.

"I don't believe you will ever go to Australia, Miss Nancy."

"Of course not—I shall never have the money. Here we are almost at home, Mr. Carruthers. Please don't tell anyone about my plans—they would laugh at me so."

"I will be as silent as the grave."

I introduced him to my family with great formality, and retired to array myself in something a little better than Patty's faded cotton. I was enjoying for evenings the reversion of Claudia's white nun's veiling. It was made in the fashion of three years before, but the gathered body and huge puffed sleeves suited me, and I liked it better than the garments that usually fell to my share. I was just ready when my mother entered. Of all our family mother has felt my failure most—perhaps because her notions of what Lady Anne would have done for me were the most resplendent; perhaps she thinks a share of my disgrace should be reflected on her since her chestnut looks are far more akin to my objectionable tint than my father's black ones.

"Nancy, did you actually walk home from the common alone with Mr. Carruthers?"

"Yes, mother."

"It was very forward and unmaidenly of you."

"Why?"

"Because he is a stranger, and you had not been introduced to him."

"But he was going to live in the same house with us for three months," I pleaded.

"That has nothing to do with it."

I thought differently, but for once was prudent enough to keep silence.

Tea passed off very nicely. I sat next my father (who is accused by all the others of spoiling me because he can't forget, in spite of my failure, I am his youngest child), and Mr. Carruthers is by mamma, so the length of the table divides us, and we do not exchange a single word; but I can hear him talk, and feel that he is impressing the others just as favourably as he does me.

Presently Sir Alaric's name is mentioned, and our new assistant owns to a boyish friendship with him. Claudia's eyes sparkle. I am sure she sees in Mr. Carruthers another argument for the baronet's becoming our frequent guest. Then her hopes are suddenly dashed. Mamma asks if there is any date fixed for Sir Alaric's return—she has heard he is to be at the Hall this month.

"I should say it was a simple rumour," answered the assistant, promptly. "The last time I saw Sir Alaric I know he had other plans. He did not hope to take his place in the county before autumn at the earliest."

"Is he engaged?" asked Claudia, a little eagerly.

"I think I may confidently say no. Sir Alaric is not a ladies' man. I have known him a good many years, and I never yet heard his name linked with any lady's."

So, in spite of their disappointment at having, perhaps, to wait three months for the arrival of the hero, here was a ray of comfort for my sisters.

CHAPTER II.

A MONTH had passed since we girls sat in our porch parlour listening to Patty's news. Sir Alaric had not arrived at Beaumont Hall, and lawyer Wilson, who had been guilty of spreading the report of his return, confessed frankly to my father he did not know when to expect him.

"The fact is, Dr. Beresford," he observed, one night, when bidden to a friendly rubber of whist, "I can't make it out. Sir Alaric was coming, I'm certain of that. He had written to me, made his plans and everything; then he chanced to pay a visit to Lady Anne Beaumont, and what she said to him I can't think, but from that time I have heard nothing of his return."

"Hem! It seems odd."

"It is very odd."

"I don't see why he should want to go and see Lady Anne. She can't be much of a relation."

"She has been fast friends with him ever since her husband's death. She paid his school bills and sent him to college, I know. It's no secret, doctor, that while Sir Fulke lived his nephew was as poor as a church mouse."

All the family, except the dear old pater, looked at me and groaned. This was to remind me that Lady Anne had "taken up" Sir Alaric after I had disappointed her, but I didn't mind a jot.

"I daresay he's very fond of her," said my mother. "He would look on her as an adopted mother."

"Well, I wish he'd come to the Hall."

So did we all.

"By the way, doctor, have you heard anything of young Pemberton?"

"Just a note, announcing his safe arrival."

"How does the substitute work?"

"Admirably!" and the pater rubbed his hands with glee. "Really, Wilson, I shall be glad for my own sake, as well as his, if Pemberton gets his ten thousand pounds and does not return to be my attendant. He'll never be half the help to me Carruthers is."

"Ah! he looks clever."

"He's a born doctor, that's what he is. Why, I might have a fully qualified partner—a fellow who'd want half the returns, and I shouldn't be a bit better off than I am with Carruthers!"

"I like the look of him," said Mr. Wilson, approvingly. "How do you get on with him, Mr. Beresford? Is he pleasant in the house?"

"Very; we all like him very much! It is a pity he is so poor!"

"Is he poor?"

"Mr. Wilson, just look at him. His clothes are good, but they have been mended to the last stage of respectability. He makes no secret of it. He says his father died when he was a lad, and left him to shift for himself!"

"So much more credit to him."

Mother sighed gently. She honestly liked John Carruthers, but yet she regretted bitterly he had ever come to Rhymington. She was afflicted with a great fear he would carry off the flower of her flock.

Mother meant Claudia to marry someday; but to see the beauty of her family engaged at eighteen to a penniless assistant would have been wormwood to her.

She would have approved of David Pemberton for Theckla, but then he had rich relations in the background; besides, Theckla and Claudia were two very different people.

It was comical to see the conflict in my mother's heart. She liked Mr. Carruthers so much as a friend—she dreaded him so entirely as a son-in-law.

The result of this was, she alternately petted and snubbed him in a way that must have been somewhat bewildering to the unfortunate young man.

Mr. Carruthers had not forgotten his promise to help me in the garden. If my flowers bloomed more luxuriously that July than they had ever done before—if the lawn was smoother and more velvet-like—assuredly the thanks were not due to me, for Mr. Carruthers took all the heavier part of the work upon himself. He never would let me get tired out. He used to say he was so strong he was meant to help me over my difficulties.

I liked him very much; he was so different from anyone I had ever met, and so kindly attentive to me. If I never saw him again at the end of the three months I should remember him always as the one person who did not remind me of my shortcomings; and when I heard mother express her fears he cared too much for Claudia I used to get a queer sort of lump in my throat, and long to burst out crying.

It seemed to me that even if he had not a farthing in the world the girl he chose ought

to be proud and happy, just because he loved her.

Time glided on. News came from David that he had found all the testimony needful, and was coming home triumphantly to receive his fortune.

My father was delighted, and then and there offered John Carruthers the post of his permanent assistant. It was September then, just three weeks before the time he was to leave us.

It was a dull morning, and a fire had been lighted in the drawing-room, and we were all gathered there together, when our dear old father, who is the most unbusiness-like of men, made his proposal.

"Of course you'll stay with me, Carruthers? You suit me a great deal better than Pemberton ever did or could!"

The assistant smiled.

"You are very good to say so."

"I mean it, man. Then we'll consider the whole thing settled."

"I shall be very glad to remain until you find an assistant to suit you."

"Why not be that assistant yourself?"

"Circumstances forbid!"

"I didn't think you were mercenary?"

"I hope I am not, sir. The fact is, I have only one relation in the world, and I am bound to consult her wishes."

"Your mother?"

"No, sir."

"And this mysterious relative objects to your remaining with me?"

"She would object to any arrangement which led to our permanent separation."

My father gave up the matter as hopeless. Unless his practice increased wonderfully he must make board and residence in his family reckon for the best part of his assistant's salary, and Mr. Carruthers' last speech had showed him he could not accept such an arrangement.

"I am very sorry."

"I can stay till you are suited, sir."

"Then you have nothing else in view?"

"Pardon me."

"What is it?"

Mr. Carruthers looked serious.

"It is a more onerous position than the one I have filled here; but I shall strive to do my duty in it."

"And your relative?"

"There is a house attached to the post I shall accept, and she will be able to visit me from time to time."

There was no more to be said. The pater put an advertisement into the *Lancet*, and my mother and sisters speculated what answers it would obtain.

As for me, I was too sad to speculate about anything. I had room but for one thought; sleeping and waking it robbed me of happiness—Mr. Carruthers was going away!

He found me one evening when the others had gone to tea socially with the Wilsons watering my ferns, a very disconsolate expression on my face, and tears not far off. He took the watering-can out of my hand, and looked at me searchingly.

"Nancy, what is the matter?"

"Nothing," I returned, hypocritically.

Oh, what was I coming to? Whatever other faults I had, until that moment I had been a truth-teller.

"You wouldn't cry for nothing; at least, I think not."

"I am not crying!" indignantly.

"You are not far from it."

Silence on my part. I would not agree to his last remark, and I could not deny it.

"Nancy."

"Well."

"I thought we were friends."

"So we are," and my eagerness almost surprised myself. "We have always been friends."

"And yet you won't answer me."

"I don't know what you asked."

"Why, you have been crying?"

"I had rather not tell you."

"But I had rather know."

Two great tears rolled slowly down my cheeks. Mr. Carruthers took my hand in his.

"Do you know that Dr. Beresford has found an assistant, and that in a week, perhaps less, I shall be far away?"

This was too much. I sank down upon a rustic bench, and sobbed as if my very heart were breaking. Mr. Carruthers watched me anxiously.

"And this is all for 'nothing'?" he asked at last. "Confess that wasn't true, Nancy?"

"It wasn't."

"And now tell me the true reason."

"I think you are very rude and unkind to persist in knowing."

"But I do persist."

I gave way.

"You are the only person who is really kind to me—the only friend I have—and you are going away!"

"And you are sorry, Nancy?"

"Sorry? I am sorer than I ever was for anything in my whole life before."

"I shall come back, dear."

"Not for years."

"In a very short time."

"But it won't be the same thing. You won't live here again. I shall not see you every day."

"I can't live at Prospect House; but we can be together every day."

"How?"

"Can't you guess?"

"No, unless we meet and go for long walks; and we couldn't do that every day. Besides, it would waste your time."

"Nancy, don't you understand I want you to come to me for always."

"What!" I gasped; "you want me to—"

"To marry me; that is all."

Ah! It was quite enough—almost too much, indeed! I sat and stared at John Carruthers as though my eyes would never return to their natural size.

"You ought not to be surprised."

"But I am—very."

"You must have seen how much I cared for you."

"I thought you liked me."

"I don't; but"—seeing my dismayed face—"I love you better than anyone in the world; and I think I could make you happy."

"I am sure you could."

"Then you will say yes, Nancy?"

"I can't; I am so bewildered. Have you really been asking me to marry you?"

"Most solemnly. I have been, as it is termed, making you an offer; and you are behaving atrociously by keeping me in suspense."

"You see I didn't expect it."

"That's your fault."

"And I am not used to such things."

He laughed. He really could not help it.

"So much the better, Nancy. I would rather far that I was your first lover."

"You are," I cried, earnestly. "I never dreamed of having such a thing."

"No; you meant to go to Australia as one of the surplus able-bodied women England could spare. You must come to me instead."

"You actually remembered that!"

"I fancy I remember pretty well all you have ever told me. Your father's dues for your board and residence used to weigh heavily on your mind. Before we are married, Nancy, we must make that all square."

"But you are so poor."

"I shan't be poor always, and I would never let poverty touch you."

"Oh! I didn't mean that. I should rather like to be poor."

"On the same principle that you wanted to go to Australia, oh?"

"But you are poor, aren't you?"

"Awfully for my position."

"Then you musn't pay father all that money for me."

"We'll talk of that when we're married."

"When we are married!" I cried, indignantly. "Why, I have never accepted you yet."

"Silence gives consent."

"Does it?"

"But you mean yes, don't you? I think you love me a little, Nancy."

"More than a little," I whispered; "better than anything else in the whole world."

He had one arm round my waist, and though I had never dreamed of such an attention I am bound to confess I submitted to it without the least resistance.

He still held the watering-pot, but for any benefit my ferns had derived from it, it might just as well have been miles away.

He stood there talking; at least, I don't think we talked much. I only know that time seemed to fly, and we were happy.

Aye, time did fly. The moon rose soft and silvery; the hall clock struck ten; we had been there for hours, but it seemed a short time—not many minutes.

I don't know how much longer we should have lingered, but someone came swiftly down the garden steps, and mother's voice exclaimed, breathlessly,—

"Nancy!"

Oh! the horror, the rebuke, the amazement all combined in that one word. I don't think mamma could have uttered a more pathetic lament in the moment when she discovered my first offence.

I suppose it must have been a somewhat overwhelming spectacle to come placidly home from spending the evening with friendly neighbours and find your youngest daughter standing in the moonlight with a lover's arm round her waist.

"Nancy!"

All thought of explanation was impossible. I knew I looked like an arch culprit, and yet I felt I had done nothing wrong. I stared wistfully at mamma, and said, inanely,—

"How early you are back!"

"Early!" exclaimed my mother, full of wrath at what she deemed my boldness.

"Early! Why, it is past ten o'clock."

"Is it really?"

Mother looked at us severely.

"Mr. Carruthers," she said, coldly, "Nancy is little more than a child, which may be some excuse for her shameful conduct. I look to you for an explanation of this—folly."

He still kept his arm round me, and he met my mother's gaze without quailing.

"Nancy has promised to be my wife, Mrs. Beresford. We may be young, but we love each other, and I see nothing shameful in our conduct. She is my future wife."

Mamma gasped.

"She is a perfect baby."

"I am eleven years older, so she will have the benefit of my experience."

"And you can't keep her."

"When I ask Dr. Beresford to let me fix our wedding-day I shall have a home fit to offer her. I own that for a few months I cannot think of marriage."

"You won't get rich in a few months," said poor mother, who had seen her husband attempt to become wealthy for eight-and-twenty years, and knew he was no nearer success than when he began.

"I don't want to be rich," I put in.

"You never will be," said mother, shortly. "Mr. Carruthers, I am sure my husband will never consent to this. Nancy is a mere child, and I can't have her fancying herself in love."

"It is not fancy, mother."

"So much the worse. You'll just fret yourself into a fever, and be a miserable, disappointed woman no nearer marriage at seven-and-twenty than now at seventeen."

Mr. Carruthers interposed.

"You need not fear, Mrs. Beresford, shall tell your husband that unless I claim my wife before her eighteenth birthday he is at liberty to withdraw his consent and break off our engagement."

"Nine months! You will never make a home for her in nine months!"

"Let me try."

Mother softened. He was such a handsome man, and she had always liked him; besides, he was the very first lover who had appeared to woo one of her brood, and I think a woman with many grown-up daughters feels it as a slight if none of them are asked to enter the state matrimonial.

"It will be a terribly bad match," she said, slowly, "but you can hear what the doctor says."

We went into my father's presence together. It was contrary to all precedent I know, but I could not bring my mind to leave John, and he did not send me away. The dear old pater looked up from his perusal of the *Lancet* with never a suspicion of the surprise in store for him.

He was very kind—kinder far than mother; but then, you see, he knew my lover's worth, and I think I have told you once before my father always kept a soft corner of his heart for me.

"I am very glad," he said, simply, when John had told him all. "I'm not afraid but with your talents, Carruthers, you'll be a rich man before you die, and even if you never get beyond a competency, her mother and I have been very happy on that. I can't give the child a farthing, you know; I only wish I could."

"She is a fortune in herself, sir."

"Is she? I'll tell you what she is—a warm-hearted, faithful little thing. However long you have to wait you need not fear Nancy's constancy."

"I have been telling Mrs. Beresford I shall come for her before her next birthday."

"Don't be in a hurry; see how you get on. I'm not eager to lose my youngest. She's hardly had fair play here, Carruthers. You see she gave us all a sad disappointment in her baby days, and I'm afraid she's been made to feel it, poor little thing. I'm glad to think she'll have a home of her own, and a good husband to take care of her. I give you my consent willingly, and may Heaven bless you both."

I was crying bitterly.

"Mother never said that. She never even hoped we'd be happy; she just told us she always thought I should be an old maid."

"And me that I was a very bad match," said Mr. Carruthers, quietly.

My father smiled.

"You took her by surprise. You see, little Nancy has three elder sisters. I daresay my wife thinks love-making has begun at the wrong end of the brood. You know, Carruthers, she used to be terribly afraid you would fancy Claudia."

"I never did."

"You don't care for beauty?"

"Indeed I do. Why, doctor, haven't I just asked you for the beauty of the family?"

I stared at him in bewilderment. Father laughed heartily.

"You must be very much in love," he said, quaintly. "We always used to call Nancy the ugly little girl. Hold up your head, child, and let me look at you. Well, you're not a beauty, but I really think you are as good-looking as ninety women out of a hundred; and now, young people, have you any idea of the time?"

We had none.

My father took out his watch, the hands pointed to midnight.

"I am not in love," said my father, comically; "and I was up at five o'clock this morning; therefore, with your permission, I will go to bed, and I sincerely advise you to do the same, Nancy," and he drew me near enough to kiss my brow. "Good-night, my child; may you look back upon this evening's work as having made the happiness of your life."

"Amen!" breathed John.

CHAPTER III.

Of course the news of my engagement had to be told to my sisters, and they received it with barely disguised scorn, expressing their opinions with the most refreshing frankness.

"Father must be dreaming to think of allowing it," said Patty, severely; "when I was seventeen I wore pinafores and had never read a novel!"

"It's quite absurd," said Theckla; "why, it's a shockingly bad match, but of course nothing will come of it, he's only playing with her. Why, by the time he has made a fortune he will have found someone much better suited to him than our ugly duckling!"

"It's most inconsiderate of Nancy," said the beauty, languidly; "we all know she is abominably selfish, but I never thought she was as bad as that. She knows Sir Alaric Beaumont may return any day, and he was pretty sure to fall in love with me; now, of course, my prospects are blighted. What baronet would think of becoming brother-in-law to a doctor's assistant, with shabby clothes and no connections?"

"You forget," I was stung into retorting. "Sir Alaric and John are old friends!"

"He says so."

"They are!"

"That's all you know about it; I daresay Mr. Carruthers has met Sir Alaric about three times; people always magnify their acquaintance with any one of position."

This conversation took place the morning after my lover's departure; mother kept back the intelligence of our folly—that was what she called it—from the girls until he was fairly away, then she told the news herself, adding—

"I don't approve of the affair, but your father has chosen to give his consent. Now, Nancy, don't go giving yourself airs like a heroine of romance; Mr. Carruthers may never be rich enough to marry you, and I regret, for my part, very much that this foolish engagement has been permitted!"

Her manner gave the cue to my sisters; they had never loved me very much, but I do think they hated me when they saw John's hoop of pearls upon the third finger of my left hand.

"There is only one good thing about it," said Theckla, reflectively, "we can write and tell Aunt Nora that one of her dear nieces is 'settled.' I think, Nancy, I can almost forgive you just for affording us that satisfaction!"

She was the scribe of the family, and sat down at once to compose her letter. I did not see it, but I know she just mentioned the fact that "our youngest sister is engaged to a gentleman in the medical profession, of whom papa thinks very highly." The letter was sent off that very day, and, I think, we all wondered what Aunt Nora would say in reply.

To our unmitigated surprise the answer came by return of post, and was addressed to mother. We all watched mother as she put on her spectacles to read it, and we could none of us make out whether she was pleased or annoyed.

"I suppose your aunt means kindly, but it is certainly very odd; just listen, girls."

Mrs. Denny's letter began by congratulating my mother warmly on my prospects, and inviting me at once on a month's visit. A cheque was enclosed for my travelling expenses and to buy anything I might need, and the name of a lady mentioned under whose care I could make the journey (Aunt Nora was then in Paris). Our relative went on to say she should have invited one of us long before, but that knowing how much her views on matrimony differed from our mother's she had resolved never to undertake even the temporary charge of one of "Susan's daughters" until the young lady's future was settled.

"Well, it is a shame!"

This from Theckla. The genius of the family was almost crimson with indignation.

"My dear," said mother, mildly, "what do you mean?"

"I wrote to her," said Theckla. "She would never have known about it but for me, and I have longed to go abroad all my life. Nancy is a mere child. What good will it do her to go to Paris? Besides, if she is to marry a pauper, and keep house on nothing a year, it will only unsettle her to have a taste of luxury; I had much better go instead."

"I am afraid you can't," said my mother, very gravely. "Your aunt goes on to say she is under the greatest possible obligations to Mr. Carruthers for the skill with which he attended her stepson, and that she rejoices at giving the young couple an opportunity of seeing more of each other. You see, Theckla, John would hardly be deceived in Nancy's identity, even if you could personate her to your aunt."

"John is a nuisance."

"And it strikes me," went on mother, "your aunt had never had your letter at all when she wrote, but sent her invitation out of pure goodwill, after hearing the news of his engagement from Mr. Carruthers."

"What business has he in Paris? I should think he had much better be looking out for something to do."

"He has a 'position,' which he is to enter on very soon. I don't know exactly what his duties will be, but I know he told your father they were very onerous. I daresay he feels a month's holiday will fit him for them."

"I wish he had never come here!" muttered Theckla.

"And what about his mysterious relation? I suppose he told you all about her, Nancy?"

"He told me she and Aunt Nora were great friends. I was very much surprised. I had an idea Aunt Nora never took kindly to poor people."

"Well, I suppose you want to go, Nancy?" asked my mother, pleasantly. "Shall I write and tell your aunt you accept her kind invitation?"

I rapturously assented, and mother and I drove into town that very afternoon on a shopping expedition. It was the first time in my life I had ever had any new clothes—clothes that had not been worn by anyone else, I mean, and I was child enough to derive keen delight from the purchases.

Mother had exquisite taste, and for once she could afford to gratify it. She chose me a soft, grey cashmere for afternoons, a walking-dress of navy blue serge, an olive green velvet for best, a couple of white muslins for evening wear, and all the little electrics of a young girl's toilet, ribbons, laces, gloves, frillings—those pretty nothings that are so small, yet make such a difference in their wearer's appearance, and are so dear to buy.

"I think you will be married, after all, Nancy," said my mother, as we drove home. "Your Aunt Nora has a great many influential friends, and she could easily get Mr. Carruthers a lucrative post."

"Why has she never got father one then, mother, if she is so rich?"

"You are growing a woman now, Nancy, and I will trust you with a secret. It may explain little things that seem puzzling. When your Aunt Nora and I were girls together, and first met your father, she was so much prettier and more fascinating than I was that a great many people thought it was for her sake his visits were paid to our little house. I have never said a word to her on the subject, but I have always fancied she wished they had been right."

"Poor Aunt Nora!"

Mother smiled.

"She was not fitted for poverty, and Mr. Denny worshipped the ground she trod on. She was a good wife to him, a true mother to his afflicted son, and now she has her liberty again, and a handsome fortune. I have often wished she would take a fancy to one of my children, but I never thought it would be to you."

"One of the others would have got on much better with her," I began, awkwardly.

"I am not so sure. You have not a single feature of his face, but in mind and character you are more your father's child than any of your sisters. I think we have all been a little hard on you, Nancy, but poverty is very grinding, dear, and we were bitterly disappointed."

I sidled up to mother, and put my hand in hers. I felt very happy that she should talk to me like this.

"You will meet Mr. Carruthers at your aunt's, and I daresay something will be settled about your marriage, but he must not think himself bound by that hasty boast of marrying you in nine months or giving you up. You are so young, it would not hurt you to wait longer than that; even a three years' engagement is not very dreadful at seventeen."

"I am not in a hurry, mother. So long as I know I belong to John I don't mind the waiting."

"And I don't want you to be too poor. I have tried poverty for nearly thirty years, and it takes a great deal of love to sweeten it."

"I don't feel afraid, mamma."

"There is one person you may meet in Paris, Nancy, I should like you to be attentive to my dear old friend your godmother."

I started.

"Lady Anne!"

"Your Aunt Nora knew her well, and I heard from Mr. Nelson that Lady Anne was in Paris for the winter, so you are almost sure to meet."

"I hope not."

"Why?"

"She is sure to hate me."

"I don't see why."

"My hair."

Mother looked at it critically.

"It is not nearly so red as it used to be. Some people might call it auburn; in fact, in a certain light it looks hardly red at all—it is much more what one might term copper-coloured. Copper-coloured hair seemed to me almost as far-fetched as a tip-tilted nose, of which I once read in Tennyson poems."

But I said nothing, and mother went on,—

"Theckla seemed a little unkind this morning, but she did not mean it. She is so clever, poor girl, and she has so longed for advantages. Nancy, if Lady Anne should ask anything about your sisters you might tell her they none of them have red hair."

"Of course I will, mother."

"And what good girls they are. I wish she would ask Theckla or Claudia to spend the winter with her. I think I would rather it were Theckla, as I can't help thinking Sir Alario must be struck with Claudia's beauty."

My dresses were completed very promptly; I was all ready by the time specified by my aunt, and my father himself took me to London and consigned me to the care of a Miss Greville, who, I found out, was going to Paris as a companion to a great friend of my relatives.

"Or I should rather say returning," said the kind spinster, when I had got over my fit of crying after papa left us, and she thought me able to enter into conversation; "for I have lived with Lady Anne Beaumont nearly ten years."

"Lady Anne?"

"You don't know her, but she is very anxious to know you. I think she is your godmother."

"Yes; she was my mother's greatest friend."

"I know her great desire to return to England has been that she might meet Mrs. Beresford."

"But she is not coming, is she?"

"Oh, yes! She returns with her nephew, Sir Alario, when he takes possession of the estate. Really, he is only her distant cousin, but he always calls her aunt."

"How surprised mother will be?"

"And pleased, I hope?"

"I—I think so," rather doubtfully; for I

remembered my mother's hopes of a sojourn in Paris for Theckla. "But mother is so busy she has very little time for visiting."

"Are you like her?"

"Not the least bit in the world."

"Mrs. Denny half thought you would be."

"Do you know my aunt well?"

"Very well indeed! She has a flat in the next house to ours."

"And is she nice?"

Miss Greville smiled.

"She is very kind; she has seen a great deal of trouble, and that makes her rather grave."

(To be concluded in our next.)

BUT NOT OUR HEARTS.

CHAPTER XX.—(continued.)

RUBY was sitting in one of the arbours, listening to Mount Severn's vapid compliments, when she saw Spragg arrive. With a few words of apology she left him at once and crossed to the gate, at which the panting horse stood.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Your sister has been taken suddenly ill. Can you come home at once?"

"Yes, yes. What is it? Is it serious?"

"We hardly know yet. She is in a fainting fit."

"Poor darling!"

"Will Lady Dorothy let you have the brougham to drive back in? I have ridden so hard I guess my horse is done," and he glanced at the mare, whose drooping head and foam-flecked flanks showed the pace at which she had come.

"Of course. I will be ready in ten minutes," and in almost less than that time she was seated beside Spragg in her aunt's neat little brougham, bowling along towards the Rest.

"What was the cause of Opal's illness?"

"Hearing suddenly of the death of a friend."

"What friend?"

"Paul Chicherly," said the man, quickly, keeping his eyes on her face.

"No!" she ejaculated; while her cheeks paled to an ashen hue.

"Yes. The *Juno* was wrecked off the Brazils, and he with several others was drowned."

"Poor, poor Opal!" whispered her sister; aloud she said, "I am indeed sorry to hear of Lieutenant Chicherly's death. He was such a bright, charming fellow. We quite looked upon him as our brother."

"So your father tells me. I thought perhaps Miss Vane entertained a warmer feeling for him, as the news affected her so much."

"Opal is all heart, all tenderness, and pity," replied the girl, quietly and naturally—so naturally that she deceived her companion better than her father had. "We were playmates in childhood, and his sudden and unhappy death would be certain to shock terribly one who cannot even see a sparrow fall without shedding tears of grief and regret."

"She seems to be very sensitive," he remarked, experiencing a sense of relief at her words, for he argued such a young girl could not dissimulate.

"She is," agreed Ruby; and then silence reigned between them.

She was wondering how Opal would bear this overwhelming sorrow, this blighting of her hopes, this sad ending to her future; he was thinking of the moment when he held the woman he loved to his breast, and wondering would she ever lie there of her own sweet will, weaving happy dreams, letting hope steal into his mind!

The Rest seemed very still as they drove up to it. The doctor's carriage stood at the door. Spragg found his way at once to the "den," and Ruby hers, to the chamber she shared with her sister.

There was a strong smell of brandy, sal

volatile, eau de Cologne, and other restoratives in the room as she entered, and Linton was bending over the bed, applying remedies.

"Is she better?"

"No," growled Vane; "she hasn't come to yet."

"Is she going to die?" she queried.

"I didn't think you were a fool," returned her father, almost savagely.

"Neither am I," she retorted, with spirit; "but look at her, and tell me if you think my question a foolish one?"

Vane did look, and as he noted the blue shade about the lips and nostrils, the set rigidity of the features, cursed himself heartily for having broken the disastrous news so suddenly to her.

"How did she learn about Paul?"

"She saw the paper," he answered curtly.

"Ah!" and father and daughter looked each other full in the face.

"I shouldn't wonder if it kills her," said the latter.

"Pooh! She is made of tougher stuff than that."

"He was all the world to her."

"He was nothing to her," said Vane, with suppressed fury. "A miserable pauper, that I would have turned from my doors without mercy had he ever returned to mar her future and my plans."

"I see," said the girl, with a look of unutterable contempt. "You meant to deal this blow," and then, throwing off her hat, she approached the bed, and helped the doctor in his efforts.

After awhile the patient seemed to breathe a little, but the teeth did not unclench, nor the lids unclose, and by the evening Mr. Spragg was in such a wild state of alarm that he telegraphed to town for two celebrated physicians.

The great men arrived at Evesham just as day was breaking, and entering the carriage sent from Temple Dene, were driven over to the Rest.

They both shook their heads gravely, and after consulting with Linton, declared the case to be a very serious one, and thought that brain fever would supervene. This surmise proved to be correct. When Opal's eyes opened later on in the day they were wild and glaring. She did not know those about her, and babbled and murmured incessantly, tossing from side to side on her pillows, while the fever flush burnt redly on her cheeks.

All her lovely amber hair was shorn off, and ice-cold bandages wrapped round the poor hot head.

Two nurses came from London to watch and tend her unceasingly, and every care and attention bestowed on her. But many times during the days that followed the stricken girl went very near the Eternal Land; many times the watchers round the bed thought she was sinking, and the doctors that there was no hope. Indeed, once after the fever first left her, she lay so still and pulseless for such a long time that Linton said in a few hours all would be over.

Then it was that Ruby sank down on her knees by Billie, who was weeping bitterly, and prayed Heaven to spare her sister, that Vane cursed himself, Chicherly, the *Juno*, fate, and other things over which he had no control; and then it was that Spragg, after one look at the still, wasted face, broke down utterly, and covering his face with his hands, rushed from the room to hide the grief he could not restrain. She was all, everything, to the long-headed, astute American. He could not bear to think she must die, and he would have bartered his vast fortune willingly to save her life.

He never left the Rest, except at long intervals just to gallop over to Temple Dene for some necessary; he lavished his money about in the most generous and reckless manner in his endeavours to alleviate the sufferings of the woman he loved.

He did not hide his feelings now; they were

too strong for him, and rent the veil he had covered them with.

Copeland Vane knew that if his daughter lived the prize was hers, if she wished to take it. And she did live. Very slowly and wearily she crawled back to that world which was such a wilderness, such a dreary desert to her without Paul. She hardly seemed to gain much strength as each day waxed and waned, and Linton said her recovery would be extremely tedious, owing to her listlessness and want of interest in her own regaining of health.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE branches were bare and leafless, the skies dull and leaden, the frost tracing delicate outlines on shrub and bush ere Opal left her room. The first day she was carried down to the library, the hitherto sacred retreat of Copeland Vane, Esq., but which he was only too happy now to put at the disposal of the probable future mistress of countless dollars and greenbacks, and more into which he allowed his four sons to come, and sit for a short time round the couch on which their sister reclined, permitting Billie even, on promise of being very quiet, to perch himself on a stool beside her, and sit there while she remained down. True, Mr. Spragg was present, repressing by a strong effort the overwhelming joy he felt at seeing Opal once more in the living-rooms, and feeling truly thankful that her life had been spared.

He came armed with a mass of lovely hot-house blooms, luscious grapes, and perfumy nectarines, for which he had received but one little "thank you;" and then the wistful blue eyes wandered away to the window, and seemed to be trying to pierce the fathomless grey clouds that scudded over the face of the heavens, as though looking for that dear face which she would never see on earth again, and for which her heart longed, as a man dying of thirst in the arid desert longs for a cup of cold water.

She was changed—fearfully changed. It was not alone the short curls that rippled all over her head in a sunny mass, nor the sunken, pale cheeks, nor the sad eyes that showed it; it was more her manner. She was listless and indifferent to everything, and took only fitful interest in Billie. She was too weak to walk, and made no effort to do so; and nothing showed the change in her more, and her indifference to all things, than the way in which she accepted the luxuries Mr. Spragg provided.

She allowed herself to be placed in the bath-chair he purchased, and to be drawn about by one of his men. She drove in his carriages, and partook of the dainties his French cook sent daily to the Rest; and finally, when Linton said the only thing for her was change of air, she made no objection when her father told her Mr. Spragg had lent a little house of his at Steepphill—a fishing village forty miles from Dene—but allowed herself to be taken hither, along with Billie and Ruby, Mr. Vane going to stay at Temple Dene, and Jenny being left alone in her glory to look after the three other boys.

The day before the invalid left home Lady Dorothy, who had been ill with a sharp attack of bronchitis, drove over to see her.

"Well, my dear, how are you?" she asked, with a queer quaver in her voice, as she noted her niece's changed looks.

"Better, aunt, thank you," she returned, listlessly.

"And you are going away to get strong and well?"

"Going away. I don't know about getting strong again."

"Where are you going?"

"Eh?" asked Opal, dreamily.

"Where are you going?"

"I don't know," and she tore a lovely rose to pieces absently as she spoke, her fixed eyes showing her thoughts were far away.

"Humph! Don't know? That curious."

"We are going to Steepphill," said Ruby, quickly, in a low tone.

"Indeed! Where does Cope get the money from to do that?"

"Mr. Spragg has lent us a house."

"Ah! I see. Interpreted, that means our rich friend has taken a house in order that Opal may have the benefit of the sea breezes, eh?"

"I suppose that is it," acknowledged the Duchess, reluctantly.

"And what does she say to it," nodding her head in the invalid's direction. "Does she object?"

"Not in the least; she doesn't object to anything now."

"That's rather a bad sign."

"A very bad one, I think."

"Is she always like that—vacantly staring at nothing?"

"Yes. I don't know what to do to arouse her interest. The doctor says she will alter as she grows stronger."

"Very likely; and she will suffer more. Her brain is partially deadened now, and her faculties stupefied by extreme weakness. With returning health will come a clearer memory of the past, and then—a sharper agony."

"I am afraid so."

"Poor child. Women were born to suffer, and she will get her full measure of pain," and in Lady Dorothy's keen eyes a tear actually glittered as she bent down and kissed the pale cheek, saying, "Good-bye, my love. I hope the change will do you good."

"Good-bye, aunt," she returned, without looking up.

"I am off to Mentone in two days," said her ladyship to Ruby as they left the room. "They tell me I must not face the winter in England; my chest suffered desperately in that last attack."

"You are quite right not to stay here."

"Humph! I may not be able to come back for a year or two. Write to me often, and if you want anything let me know."

"Yes, aunt."

"I suppose, though, you won't want for much if Cope means business with the Yankee."

"I think not," and the two women's eyes met in a meaning glance.

"It's a shame to sacrifice her," declared the elder.

"Perhaps she won't mind—now."

"Perhaps not; yet I think she will."

"We will hope not, for her sake."

"Hoping won't help her, nor anything else, if Cope has made up his mind. She's his daughter, and he'll sell her as coolly as a Turk would his slave, if it suits his purpose."

"I fear so."

"Pity 'tisan't you that parchment-faced Yankee wants. You wouldn't mind being bartered for some thousands a year, a country house, a town mansion, and a few diamonds thrown into the bargain."

"Not at all," acknowledged the second Miss Vane, with charming candour; "I should rather like it."

"Ah, well, your turn will come some day."

"I hope so. I don't want to stay here all my life," and she looked at the wretchedly-kept garden, with its sodden, decaying leaves and empty beds.

"I don't suppose you do. Severn Hall would suit you better, eh?"

"I have no doubt it would, though never having seen it I can't say for certain."

"The Earl seemed rather attentive to you; perhaps he means business."

"Perhaps so."

"Not at present though, for he's gone to Norway a-fishing," and after delivering this piece of news, with a malicious twinkling of the eyes, her ladyship got into the brougham, and drove off, leaving Ruby on the doorstep with knitted brows and drooping mouth.

The next day Mr. Spragg escorted the Misses Vane and Billie to Steepphill, and installed them in a neat villa with "all modern im-

provements"—one of two that some enterprising builder had run up; and then, doubting the feasibility of letting them at such a place to fashionable and well-paying tenants, had sold them for a song to an aboriginal fisherman, who had made something out of fresh herrings, kippered mackerel, and other spoils of the deep, and who thought it would add to his dignity to become the proprietor of the two best buildings in the village or cove, for it was little more. The houses, all told, were only a score, and the inhabitants not more than treble that number.

Mrs. Marshall was there to receive them, and a couple of maids, and altogether the arrangements promised to be most satisfactory and comfortable. The donor of these comforts hovered about all day, and only set off on his homeward journey at the last minute.

He would have dearly liked to stay there entirely, and watch the gradual return to health and strength of the being who was more to him than anyone else had ever been in the past, or could ever be in the future; but prudence forbade, and so he travelled back to Temple Dene, and found Vane in his library, surrounded by ponderous and valuable tomes, smoking his choicest cigars, and drinking his finest wines, and had to content himself with the society of the father, as he could not have that of the daughter, and looked forward with all the eagerness of a lover in his teens to the letters which Ruby sent regularly twice a week to her father, and which were cautious chronicles of Opal's sayings and doings, or rather, strictly speaking, of her doings, for she spoke little.

The fresh, yet balmy, sea-breezes brought the colour slowly, but surely, back to the wan cheeks, strength to the listless, wasted frame, but no light to the wistful eyes, no joy to the bruised heart.

They were days of pain and agony to her, those winter ones spent at Steepphill, that favoured spot sheltered by high, grassy downs, rising one above the other, and stretching out on either side of the cove, where the winter myrtles grew luxuriantly, and the great tree-like fuschias flourished, and the gay-coloured geraniums lifted their bright blossoms in the sunshine, and the west wind blew soft and warm.

For hours she would set on the shingly beach, watching the gem-like rays on the still sea, calm and placid as a millpond, that once in its fury had risen storm-lashed, mountains high, and had engulfed the good ship *Juno*, and with it her lover, her Paul, leaving her desolate, heart-broken, weary, without a hope or interest in life.

She would sit staring out seaward till twilight fell, and the ebbing tide flowing out left a stretch of smooth strand, and the lights commenced to twinkle through the purple haze, and the line where sea and sky met became indistinct; then with a sigh she would rise, and taking Billie's offered hand walk slowly home, Turk pacing quietly and solemnly at her side.

She never mentioned his name. Her grief found no outlet, no relief, in words. It was too deep for that. But in her desolation she wished she had not lived to face the pain and agony of each day, the dreary blackness of the future, for the wound had struck to the depths of her heart, and she could not escape her fate. There was no draught of the waters of Lethe for her; she must suffer unutterable torture, without a ray of hope to brighten or lessen it.

Copeland Vane had his wish; Paul was at the bottom of the sea, and the girl he loved was heart-broken. But what cared the selfish egotist for that? Why nothing, simply nothing. The stumbling-stone was removed, the course clear for Spragg; and when the violets and primroses were peeping forth he urged the American to go and try his luck.

"Isn't it rather soon?" expostulated the "dry goods man," showing more delicacy of feeling than the aristocrat did.

"Too soon? In what way?"

"Well—you know, she's been very ill, and—and—Chicherly's death evidently upset her very much," he replied, unable to divest himself of a vague idea that they had been lovers.

"Pooh! that was nothing. She would have been affected to quite as great a degree if one of the boys had died."

"Are you sure?" he asked, doubtfully, yet wishing to be told he was.

"Quite sure; and you know, Washington (Vane had become quite fatherly and familiar in his mode of addressing his would-be relative), she will be much better as your wife. You can give her all the comforts she needs, and take her abroad for a thorough change."

"True," assented the suitor.

"So take my advice. Go and woo, and win."

Mr. Spragg did take this advice, not without sundry misgivings and forebodings. He was anything but sure of success, as he turned his steps towards the beach, where Ruby told him he would find Opal, one March morning; and when he saw her, sitting like a statue gazing out seaward, with the great dog by her side, he turned to beat a retreat; but a loud bay from Turk revealed his presence, and Miss Vane rose to greet him.

"How are you?—feelin' better, I trust," he said, awkwardly.

"Yes, I am better, thank you," she returned, in her usual listless way, lifting the wistful blue eyes to his face.

"You don't look very strong."

"No."

"You ought to go abroad."

"Do you think so?"

"Yes. Don't you?"

"I haven't thought about it."

"Well, think now."

"What would be the use of doing that?" she answered, wearily.

"Would you like to go?" he persisted.

"It doesn't matter whether I would or not, as I couldn't, if it were the chief desire of my life."

"Yes, you could. You have only to express the wish, and it shall be gratified."

"No," she said, shaking her head, and taking too little interest in the conversation to try and understand his meaning. "My father could not afford the expense of a trip abroad, and my aunt has done so much already that I could not trespass further on her generosity and kindness."

"It wouldn't be necessary to do that."

"No?"

"No. I would take you."

"You!" she exclaimed, looking at him in amazement, and feeling a strange sensation of fear creep over her as she met the glance of his deep-set eyes glowing with passion.

"Yes. Has it never occurred to you, Miss Vane, that I—love you?"

"Mr. Spragg!"

"Yes, I love you, and would make you my wife if you will have me. I am not good at brilliant speeches, and I can't say a hundredth part of what I feel; but I guess no man will ever care for you more than I do, nor cherish you better than I will, if you'll give me the right. Miss Vane—Opal, won't you answer me?" and he bent down to look at her face.

The frozen horror of it gave him a shock.

"You don't care for me," he said, quickly; "you won't have me."

"I—I—shall—never—marry," she gasped, at last.

"Don't say that. Give me some hope. I'll wait for you—wait for years. I calculate I'm not likely to change at my time of life. I've a large stock of patience, and I love you dearly."

"Don't, don't," she moaned, shrinking back, and thinking of those other lips, now cold in death, that had spoken similar words—spoken them, too, with the fervour and ardour of youth.

"Can't you like me? Can't you try to? Your father wishes it. He sent me here," he urged.

"My father," she whispered, and then, without another word, sank down at his feet.

"Good heavens! I knew it was too soon," he muttered, raising her in his strong arms, and bearing her across the stretch of golden sand, where the fisher-folk dried their nets, that lay between the sea and the villa.

"Your sister has fainted," he said, briefly, as he laid her on a couch by the open window.

"Ah! I thought she would," said Ruby, coolly.

"Why?" he demanded, sharply.

"Because she is still weak, and any excitement or surprise upsets her," she replied, judiciously, as she unfastened her dress, and bathed her face with eau de Cologne.

"I see; you know what I came for?" he asked, moodily.

"Yes, I know."

"Your father sent me."

"It is too soon yet."

"Is there any hope?" he queried, eagerly.

"I can't say," she replied, guardedly.

"There may be."

"Have I your good wishes?"

"My best," she returned, with emphasis.

"You had better go now," she added, as the colour came in flickering, uncertain flashes over Opal's face, and the lids quivered. "I will write to night, and tell you how she is."

"Thanks. I shall look eagerly for a letter," and pressing her hand, with a lingering look at the half-unconscious girl, he strode away.

Opal's first question when she recovered was, "Is he gone?" and being told he was she gave a sigh of relief, and let her head sink back on the cushion; but she raised it again almost directly, and looking steadfastly at Ruby, said,—

"Tell me, is it aunt who has paid for this house, and all the luxuries and comforts I have had during my illness?"

"Why do you ask?" returned the other, evasively.

"Because I want to know. I have been too wretched, too utterly absorbed with my sorrow to take much notice of things, and I fear now that I have been labouring under a misapprehension. I thought aunt had provided this home for us. Was I wrong?"

"Yes, you were wrong," reluctantly admitted the Duchess.

"Then—who—who—has conferred—these benefits?" she faltered.

"Mr. Spragg."

"Ruby! I feared this."

"Why feared? It has all been very comfortable."

"A comfort which in the end may be dearly purchased."

"Sufficient for the day, etc.," rejoined Ruby, lightly.

"We must leave here," said Opal, slowly, the sad blue eyes watching the brown-sailed fishing cobbles coming in with the tide. "I cannot stay here any longer."

"Dad must be consulted."

"I am well now. I shall go home," and rising with weak and trembling steps, that gave the lie to her words, she passed out up to her room, and began to make preparations for a speedy departure, feeling that she could not stay in the house of the man she had that day refused, nor take his charity, no matter what came of her not doing so.

CHAPTER XXII.

A FEW days later they were all back at the Rest, including Mr. Vane, who was in a furious temper, snapping and snarling and growling at everyone because his dearly-beloved friend, Washington C. Spragg, Esq., had gone abroad, and left Temple Dene shut up, and that meant a stoppage of the liberal supplies of all sorts—the good dinners, the good wines, and the good mounts; meant, in fact, semi-starvation to the inmates of the Rest, for Vane had been rather imprudent and lavish in his expenditure, thinking it would be all right between Spragg and his daughter; and Jenny, during

Ruby's absence, had run up rather alarming bills. Altogether, it was a dismal look-out, and even the Duchess's stout heart sank at the prospect before her.

Lady Dorothy was somewhere in the Riviera—they didn't exactly know where. Max had rejoined his regiment in India; there was no one to help, and matters became worse and worse every day.

The boys were taken from school, Jenny's wages were promised and promised and never paid, and their larder, during most of the week, resembled Mother Hubbard's cupboard, and was bare.

The want of nourishment told terribly on Billie's fragile frame; and Opal, not having quite recovered, suffered too, and grew visibly thinner and paler.

"A pretty mess you've made of it, refusing a good offer," said her father to her with suppressed ferocity, one day, when the sharp pinch of poverty had been more apparent than usual.

"Father!" she exclaimed, stretching out her hands, as though to ward off a blow, for it hurt her bitterly that they should speak of marriage to her, and Paul only a few months dead.

"Don't act to me!" he cried, furiously. "I know you, I understand you. A vain, selfish, frivolous girl, who would see those nearest her starve rather than save them, as she easily might."

"Not easily, not easily," she moaned. "It would be worse than death to me—this marriage."

"Stuff! Your head is full of romantic nonsense. Get it out of it as soon as possible. Spragg has done much for us; he can do more. He can save me from ruin, and the boys from growing up like savages, and Billie from an early death."

"Ah!" exclaimed the wretched girl, involuntarily, at the mention of her pet; and Vane, seeing he had struck the right chord, continued.

"The child wants every delicacy and nourishment, and a few months in Italy. That would pull him round, make him all right. You know how powerless I am."

"I know," she sighed, "but I cannot be false to Paul."

"Paul is dead!"

"He lives in my memory, and I will be true to his," she said more firmly. "He is worthy of all constancy and respect from me, the woman he loved so truly and honourably, so far better and more purely than men generally love."

"How do you know that?"

"I am certain of it. My instinct tells me he was mine alone."

"Your instinct may mislead you."

"That is hardly likely."

"And I think it very probable. 'Like father, like son, you know. Doubtless the old proverb holds good in this case.'"

"I am sure it does not. I could not believe anything ill of my love."

"Not even if you were given proof of his backsliding," he persisted, eyeing her keenly, for an idea had occurred to him by which he thought he might mature a plan that would make Opal lose her faith in the dead man.

"Proof," she faltered; "there could be no proof of any sin of his. He was too good to do anything wrong."

"That is your opinion. But supposing indubitable proof was put before you that he had wronged a woman, and then cast her off in the most heartless way, would that alter your love and reverence for his memory?"

"I—I—hardly—know," she faltered, with a new look of pain in the wistful eyes that would have melted a stone, but which had not the slightest effect on Copeland Vane.

"I think I do," he muttered, as she left the room to hide the tears that rolled down the pale cheeks. "His faithlessness and Billie's ill-health are the weapons I must bring into play," and forthwith he set to work, and turned out the contents of an old desk of Fishlake Chicherly's which Mr. Spragg had given him

at his request during one of his visits to Temple Den; and after reading through many letters, soiled and yellow with age, he selected one of fresh appearance, across which were written some words in Paul's handwriting, and folding it up carefully put it in one of the pigeonholes of his bureau. After which he wrote a long letter to Mr. Spragg, at the Hotel Continental, Paris, and actually went down to the village and posted it himself.

That letter brought the American back to Temple Dene in less than a month, and he resumed his old habits of intimacy with the inhabitants of the Rest, and while being courteous and kind to all paid no particular attention to the woman he wished for his wife, so she was not alarmed.

"I am glad the mummy has come back," observed Ruby, one morning shortly after Mr. Spragg's return, as she and her sister sat in the den diligently patching the boys' clothes that were almost past that operation.

"Are you?"

"Yes. Are you?"

"No. Why should I be?"

"I thought you might have changed your mind."

"I am not likely to do that."

"No, unfortunately. I wish you were."

"Ruby!" she cried, reproachfully, "You can't mean that."

"I do, indeed," returned the Duchess, composedly. "It would be much better for you and all of us if you were Mrs. Spragg. Poor Paul is dead; there is no use in mourning always for the dear ones we have lost, and you could do so much for us if you were the millionaire's wife."

"And so little for myself," with a wan smile.

"Sometimes it is a duty to sacrifice ourselves for the good of others."

"Would you do it?"

"I would certainly marry our transatlantic friend if he asked me. To my mind anything would be better than the life of utter misery we have endured during these past two months."

"And to my mind nothing could excuse my being faithless to the memory of the man who loved me so truly."

"There is your best excuse," and Ruby waved the tattered coat in her hand towards Billie, who lay on the sofa sleeping, his wasted face looking ghastly pale as it rested on the red cushions.

"Ah!" cried Opal, with a bitter sob. "I will work for him, slave for him, anything but sell myself to that man."

"You can't work; there isn't anything you could do that would bring in sufficient money to give the child what he wants."

"Don't, don't!" said the wretched girl, covering her ears; "you torture me!" and she sank on her knees by the couch, and laying her head on the cushion near the child's, wept tears that scorched her cheeks as they fell, for they were wrung from the depths of an agonising despair.

Meanwhile Mr. Spragg continued his visits, and his presents of flowers and fruit. Knowing that Billie was Miss Vane's favourite he strove to conciliate her through him, and invariably brought him a present of some sort or other. Now it was a great box of chocolates, or a paper of caramels, then an engine that worked by steam, or a cart loaded with logs, or a bundle of bright-coloured picture-books that gave the child unfeigned pleasure, which was so apparent, that if Opal's love was not won at least her gratitude was, and that was something, Spragg thought—a step on the road, he hoped.

Still, as the long summer days wore away, these hopes did not seem to come any nearer being fulfilled; and Vane, who watched the game with sombre eyes, felt that he must play his trump card.

"Still mourning the lost one?" he asked, sneeringly, as Opal brought him his cup of afternoon tea. "Haven't you forgotten him yet?"

"I shall never do that," she answered, simply.

"It is about time you did. A worthless scoundrel, who was hardly fit to live!"

"Father, how dare you speak of him in such terms to me?" she panted, turning on him like a tigress.

"How dare I? That is rather good!"

"It is cruel, unkind to say one word against him. He cannot defend himself. Surely the dead are sacred?"

"Not when their evil influence militates against the advancement and welfare of the living."

"His influence is not evil; say, rather, sacred and holy."

"Perhaps you won't think so after reading that," and he tossed her the letter he had found in Fishlake's desk.

With trembling hand she unfolded it. It was addressed to Mr. Chichester, and contained a piteous appeal for mercy and help from a woman, who, after being seduced, was left to starve in Paris with her helpless infant.

(To be continued.)

FACETIÆ.

"I NEVER ARGY agin a success," said Artemus Ward. "When I see a rattlesnake's head sticking out of a hole, that hole belongs to that snake."

COCKNEY: "Are there many fools in this part of the world, my lad?" Nondescript: "Not as I knows on, sur! Why, d'yer feel a bit lonesome, loike?"

"Tis love that makes the world go round!" exclaimed the married man whose wife had chased him around the room till the walls seemed to spin like the many skirts of a ballet in a fourth-class opera.

HIS MASTER: "Did you take those boots of mine to be soled, Larry?" IRISH VALET: "I did, sor; and see the thrife the blag'yard gave me for 'm! said they were purty nigh wore through!"

"Yes, sir," said the entomologist, "I can tame flies so that when I whistle they will come and alight on my hand." "Pahaw!" said the bald-headed man, "they come and alight on my head without my whistling." The entomologist sat down.

FOUR-YEAR-OLD is very anxious for a baby sister, and quite often importunes his mother to buy one. "But," says mamma, "I haven't money enough to buy one." "Well, but, mamma, can't you get one on credit?" was the eager inquiry.

"I see you are building a new house, Brown?" "Yes, you are right." "Made the money out of whisky, I suppose?" "No." "Why, you are a liquor dealer, are you not?" "Oh, yes; but the money I'm putting into this house was made out of the water I put into the whisky. Every cent was made out of water, sir."

"Is your master at home?" asked a deputy sheriff at the door of a palatial residence. "Naw, sor," responded the new servant. "Where is he?" "At Newport, sor." "How do you know he is at Newport?" "Sure, didn't he tell me if any suspicious characters called to say so?"

SAID A nervous lady to an Austin lady, at whose house she was making a social call: "Are you not afraid that some of your children will fall into that cistern in your yard?" "Oh, no," was the complacent reply; "anyhow, that's not the cistern we get our drinking water from."

A LITTLE girl was taught to close her evening prayer, during the temporary absence of her father, with "and please watch over my papa." It sounded very sweet, but the mother's amusement may be imagined when she added:—"and you'd better keep an eye on mamma, too!"

JOHN BILLINGS says: Kontentment and pashunes are reckoned among the virtues, but they too often are only lazy ones.

JONES: "Can you always tell a fool?" BROWN: "If he doesn't ask too much; what would you like to know?"

YOUNG HOUSEWIFE (consulting with cook about the dinner for a party): "As a second course we will have eel." "How much ought I to get, ma'am?" YOUNG WIFE: "I fancy about ten yards will be sufficient."

"I LIKE smart women well enough," said Fenderson, "but I wouldn't care to marry a woman who knew more than I did." "And so," suggested Fogg, "you have been forced to remain single."

"Does your wife talk in her sleep?" asked one married man of another one day when they were comparing notes. "I don't lay awake to find out," replied the heartless husband, "but she talks all the rest of the time, so I rather suppose she does."

"You have played the *deuce* with my heart," said a gentleman to a young lady, who was his partner in a game of whist. "Well," replied the lady with an arch smile, "it was because you played the *knave*."

A CERTAIN judge having been called on after dinner for a song, pleaded that he lacked power to oblige the company. A wag present expressed great surprise at the excuse, as he said it was notorious that numbers had been "transported" by his voice.

"THE more you fill a barrel the more it will weigh," said a teacher. "Please, ma'am, is there not any exception to the rule?" asked an urchin. "None whatever. Whatever you put in a barrel adds weight to it." "I know an exception," broke in Bobby Sharp. "You don't. What is it?" "Well, ma'am, the more holes you put in a barrel, the lighter it gets."

NICKS young man, lecturing to a Sunday-school: "Now is there any little boy or little girl who would like to ask any question? Well, little boy, I see your hand; you needn't snap your fingers. What questions would you like to ask?" SMALL BOY: "How much longer is this talk going to last?"

SCENE: Baker's shop. Enter little boy: "Please I want two new loaves." He tenders fivepence in payment. Hard shopwoman: "The bread has risen a halfpenny. You haven't brought enough." Little boy, after a moment's pause. "That's all mother gave me. When did it go up?" Hard shopwoman: "To-day." Little boy: "Then, please, I'll take two of yesterday's bakes!"

A GRANDFATHER coming to read his paper found that he had mislaid his spectacles, and thereupon declared, "I have lost my glasses somewhere, and can't read the paper." A little three and a half-year-old girl, desiring to assist him, answered, "G'an'p, you go outside and look froo ze window, and I'll hold ze paper up so you can read it."

A BRIGHT YOUTH—Fond parent (to youth home from school): "What place have you got in your class this week?" Boy: "The twenty-sixth." "How many of you are there in your form?" "Twenty-six." A fortnight later the father repeated the question, to which his son and heir made answer: "The twenty-seventh." "Twenty-seventh? There are only twenty-six of you in all!" "Oh, there's a new boy."

A STORY is told of a merchant who died the other day, which illustrates the shrewdness which made him successful in business. He discovered on one occasion that his till had been robbed, but resolved to say nothing about it, even to the members of his own family. Three months afterwards one of his customers asked him: "Did you ever find out who took that money out of your till?" The merchant replied: "I never have till now, but now I know it was you, as I have never told anyone that I lost it." The customer had to refund the missing money.

SOCIETY.

THE Queen is certainly showing much more of herself to her loyal subjects this season than she has been wont to do for many a year past. Her Majesty, it is said, will open the Holloway College for Women at Egham, in June, and another Drawing Room and Levée will be held in May.

THE Queen has condescended to patronise the fancy fair to be held in aid of the completion of the Regimental Drill Hall, School of Arms, &c., now in course of construction in James-street, Buckingham-gate. The opening ceremony will take place in the new building on Thursday, the 17th of June, and the fair will be continued on the two following days. Those who wish to take part in this patriotic undertaking are requested to communicate with the honorary secretary, Major the Hon. Scott Napier.

PRINCESS BEATRICE has got her "marriage chest" from the women of Bristol, so a contemporary assumes that somebody has made up the deficiency, and the case, coverlet, and the rest are all paid for. It apparently occurred to somebody at Windsor Castle that it would be a nice thing for Prince Henry to acknowledge the gift on behalf of his wife. And he has done so in a gracefully-worded letter.

PRINCE ALBERT VICTOR will open the International Exhibition at Edinburgh on the 6th May. He is beginning now to go about, and seems to join the pleasant manners of his father with the grace of the Princess. He has a splendid career before him.

THE Duchess of Edinburgh will spend Easter in the Isle of Wight, having postponed starting for Coburg till late in May. The Duke before his departure purchased a new palace there, which is being prepared for the reception of the Duchess and her children.

THE marriage of Captain Borrowes, 11th Hussars, eldest son of Sir Erasmus Borrowes, of Barretstown Castle, Kildare, with Miss Aline Holden, youngest daughter of the late Mr. W. Holden, of Palace House, Lancashire, was a grand affair.

The bride was attired in a dress of ivory-white velours frisé, draped in heavy folds, and lifted on one side to show a petticoat of satin, trimmed with Honiton lace, caught with a bouquet of orange blossom and ostrich feathers. She had a cluster of real orange flowers in her hair, and a tulle veil.

Her train was carried by two pages, her nephews, the Hon. T. E. Ellis and Master Cuthbert Parker. They wore Charles II. costumes of white cashmere, with full cherry-coloured vests, lace collars, silk stockings, and shoes, with cherry-coloured rosettes. There were no bridesmaids.

Lady Howard de Walden, sister of the bride, looked well in grey velvet, bordered with chinchilla, and silver bonnet with grey feathers.

The bride and bridegroom subsequently left for Ireland, the bride travelling in a dress of green Sicilienne over a petticoat of the same colour, striped with green velvet and gold, and had green and gold bonnet to match.

A RUSSIAN lady of exalted station has, it is said, set the fashion to Paris dames by designing a new sporting costume. The charming Muscovite has chosen a garb of surprising lightness and tightness, which also gives one the idea that it is about to end, not in a dual skirt, but in a masculine dual garment, such as Doctress Walker would have pronounced to be quite the thing. The ornaments are horses' heads, which are worked all over the costume in velvet, the manes and tails being of silver thread. The Muscovite lady has an almost unapproachable grace, which would set off and demand the highest admiration and approval for even much more pronounced eccentricities.

STATISTICS.

COERCION AND CRIME IN IRELAND.—In 1833 the Government of Lord Grey proposed to Parliament a strong coercion Act. At that time the information at their command did not distinguish between agrarian and ordinary crime as the distinction is now drawn. At the present time it is easy to give the information that serious agrarian crimes in Ireland in 1881 were 1,011, and in 1885 were 245. Going back to the period of 1832 the contrast is perhaps still more striking. In 1832 the homicides in Ireland were 248, in 1885 they were sixty-five. The cases of intentions to kill were in the first of those years 209, and in 1885 they were thirty-seven. Serious offences called crimes in Ireland in 1832 were 6,014, and in 1885 they were 1,057. The whole criminal offences in Ireland were in 1832 14,000, and in 1885, 2,683. But it must be remembered that the decrease of crime is not so great as it looks, because the population of Ireland in 1832 was about eight millions. The exact proportion is fairly represented, considering that the population of Ireland now, compared with that time, is under two-thirds; the crime of Ireland now, compared with that period, is under one-fifth.

GEMS.

HE that studies books alone will know how things ought to be; and he that studies men will know how things are.

THERE is nothing so true that the damps of error have not warped; nothing so false that a sparkle of truth is not in it.

THE only way for a rich man to be healthy is by exercise and abstinence, to live as if he was poor; which are esteemed the worst parts of poverty.

THE bad man, diffusing the hue of his own spirit over the world, sees it full of treachery, selfishness, and deceit. The good man is continually looking for and sees noble qualities.

THE rector was a likeable man; sweet tempered, ready-witted, frank, without grins of suppressed bitterness or other conversational flavours which make half of us an affliction to our friends.

AMONG all the virtues, humility, the lowest, is pre-eminent. It is the safest, because it is always an anchor; and that man may be truly said to live the most content in his calling who strives to live within the compass of it.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

SPONGE CAKE WITH ALMOND FILLING.—Bake a sponge cake in layers, and when cold take a pint of cream, sweeten and flavour with vanilla; chop a pound of almonds, stir into the cream, then spread thickly between each layer.

PRUNE PIE.—Stew a quantity of prunes until soft, remove the stones, sweeten to taste, and add for each pie the beaten whites of two eggs; beat with the prunes until thoroughly mixed; bake with two crusts.

DELICIOUS LITTLE FRIED CAKES.—Beat two eggs well, add to them one ounce of sifted sugar, two ounces of warmed butter, two tablespoonfuls of yeast, a teaspoonful of lukewarm milk and a little salt. Whip all well together, then stir in by degrees one pound of flour, and, if requisite, more milk, making thin dough. Beat it until it falls from the spoon, then set it to rise. When it has risen, make butter or lard hot in a frying-pan, cut from the light dough little pieces the size of a walnut, and without moulding or kneading fry them pale brown. As they are done, lay them on a napkin to absorb any of the fat.

MISCELLANEOUS.

THERE is in all of us an impediment to perfect happiness; namely, weariness of the things which we possess and a desire for things we have not.

IT signifies little what we say of our acquaintances, so that we do not tell them what others say against them. Tale-bearers make all the real mischief.

IT argues a poor opinion of ourselves when we cannot admit any other class of merit beside our own, or any rival in that class.

PROBABLY the subject of money in some way or other lies at the root of more family discord than any other single topic. The whole matter of earning and spending it, of giving and lending it, of using and misusing it, furnishes continual ground for disputes and hard feeling; and that family, rich or poor, which introduces the subject only for quiet consultation and mutual co-operation is, other things being equal, an exceptionally happy and harmonious one.

IT is well to shake off error just as fast as we discover it to be such; but a truth mingled with much error and many fallacies, held honestly, earnestly, and sincerely, is far better, because more vital, than the most carefully-weeded truth held loosely with half-hearted indifference. In politics, in theology, in philosophy, it is not so much which party we side with—though that is significant—but whether the principles we profess are thoroughly and truly our own, whether we cling to them with faith and trust, whether they are to be the embodiment of our best conceptions and highest ideals. If they are, we need have no fear of losing the real and permanent truth that is in them, though the forms which have gathered around them may drop away when no longer needed. Error crumbles away of itself, but truth remains for ever firm and unshaken.

THERE is at the present day a strong tendency to undervalue the past, and to sever our connection with it. With all our words of adulation, we seldom give our hearts' reverence to the thoughts and lives of the good and great that have passed from among us. While we perpetuate their names and merits in print or in marble, we forget to perpetuate their best results in thought or in work by loyally carrying it on to a still higher plane. To accept heartily and thankfully all the treasures of love, of wisdom, and of labour that our friends have bequeathed to us, and to build upon them the best structures we are capable of erecting—this is the best way of truly honouring and cherishing their memory.

FUEL OF THE FUTURE.—The house of the near future, a contemporary thinks, will have no fireplace, steam pipes, chimneys, or flues. Wood, coal oil, and other forms of fuel are about to disappear altogether in places having factories. Gas has become so cheap that already it is supplanting fuels. A single jet fairly heats a small room in cold weather. A genius has produced a simple design for heating entirely by gas at a mere nominal expense. It is a well-known fact that gas throws off no smoke, soot, or dirt. He filled a brazier with chunks of coloured glass, and placed several jets beneath. The glass soon became heated sufficiently to thoroughly warm a room 10 by 30 feet in size. This design does away with the necessity for chimneys, since there is no smoke; the ventilation may be had at the window. The heat may be raised or lowered by simply regulating the flow of gas. The coloured glass gives all the appearance of fire; there are black pieces to represent coal, red chunks for flames, yellowish white glass for white heat, blue glass for blue flames, and hues for all the remaining colours of spectrum. Invention already is displacing the present fuels for furnaces and cooking ranges, and glass doing away with delay and such disagreeable objects as ashes, wood, &c.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

INQUIRER.—The salaries of lighthouse keepers vary according to duties and locality.

LOTTIE.—We suggest type-writing as the best employment you can undertake at present.

BESS.—1. No personal knowledge of their efficacy. 2. Fair.

MAY.—We do not insert matrimonial advertisements of any kind.

C. H. B.—1. In the case stated no naturalisation papers are necessary. 2. Only water is used. Not to our knowledge. 4. There is no book of instructions. Directions for playing accompany the instrument.

S. G. M.—The first devices on coins were generally the forms of animals, local gods, river gods, nymphs, &c. It is contended that no human head was impressed on a coin until after the death of Alexander the Great.

GRACE GAY.—"The Reform Club" (Pall Mall), was established in 1834. Number of members, 1,400. Secretary, F. W. Halford. It is designated as "strictly liberal."

ANXIOUS ALICE.—The cheapest and most satisfactory method would be to have it redyed. Amateur attempts at dyeing and re-dyeing, except in very exceptional cases, or to a very small extent, are generally failures.

AMY. F.—What is the use of fretting about a young fellow who cares nothing about you? At your age you ought to be able to dismiss him from your mind altogether.

T. R. D.—Sponges were for a long time regarded as plants, but the best naturalists are now agreed that they belong to the animal kingdom. The sponges of commerce are procured chiefly in the Mediterranean and Bahama Islands.

J. H.—You will undoubtedly improve if you practice for two hours every day from good copies, but it must be every day. Intermitting practice in any study is comparatively useless; it must be steady and continuous to be of any avail.

ROSE L.—1. Not at all. 2. The best thing is to live temperately and take as much active exercise as possible. 3. Katie means "purity." 4. Keep them covered all day and at night; apply glycerine. 5. Any bookseller will tell you.

T.—Of the years concluding centuries, only every fourth is a leap-year, beginning with 2,000; which is divisible by 400, as is also 2,400, &c. The regular leap-years coincide with those that are divisible by 4, and thus they may be known.

R. D. R.—Study law in your spare moments, and when you have saved sufficient money to warrant a relinquishment of your present position as teacher, enter the office of a first-class lawyer and complete your studies under his direction.

EMME.—1. Engaged couples may, with all due propriety, indulge in "love's sweet kisses," but should be careful to avoid offensive public demonstrations of their affection for each other. 2. A bold, dashing and lovable disposition is indicated by your writing.

MICHAEL.—1. Warts are easily removed by touching them daily with lunar caustic (nitrate of silver) dipped in clean water. There are several other remedies, but none of them come as highly recommended as the above. 2. It denotes considerable strength of character.

LINA.—Any foreign body discovered in the eye may generally be removed by wiping it off with the head of a pin, having a silk handkerchief turned over it. If this fails to detach it, it may be carefully picked up by running under it the point of a lancet, toothpick, or penknife.

C. W. R.—The first legal work taken up by a law student is Blackstone's Commentaries, after which he reads works on equity, practice and pleading, evidence, &c. To gain this knowledge properly, he should place himself under the tuition of a lawyer, from whom may be gained much practical information that cannot be found between the covers of law books. Consequently, it is not at all likely that anything but a theoretical knowledge can be obtained without a preceptor.

M. D. V.—1. E's actions are to be highly commended, as no man of principle could endure your studied snubbing, and still press his suit. No matter whether it was merely a joke on your part, he had every reason to leave the house and cut your acquaintance. Some casual friend may be able to patch up your differences, but it is hardly possible that the former feeling of love or even friendship will be fully rekindled. 2. June 18, 1864 and May 22, 1875, both came on a Saturday. 3. Light-brown hair, in full accord with the colour of your eyes and complexion.

SUFFERER.—To treat ingrowing toe-nails, apply to the tender part a small quantity of perchloride of iron, which can be purchased at any chemist in a fluid form. A moderate sensation of pain, constriction, or burning will follow the application, and in a few minutes the tender surface will be felt to be dried up, and will cease to be painful. Let the wood-like flesh remain for two or three weeks, and then soak it off in warm water, when a new and healthful structure will be found firm and solid below. If thereafter the nails be no more cut around the corners or sides, but always curved in across the front end, they will grow only forward; and by wearing a shoe of reasonably good size and shape, all further trouble will be avoided.

TERSE.—We would not advise you to emigrate at all under the circumstances you state, if you can avoid it, especially as you have no situation in view at the place named. Have you no acquaintance with whom you could correspond on the subject?

N. A. M. B.—1. A nice-looking and intelligent face. 2. Keep them covered and put them as little as possible into hot water. Perhaps it is caused by defective circulation in which case there is no remedy. 3. Paint them with tincture of iodine. 4. Do not attempt to bring the hair to one uniform colour. It is one of its greatest charms to have two shades.

THE MAID OF KENT.—Your question would lead us to believe, if your handwriting did not belie the fact, that you had never been to school or to church. It is almost incredible that anyone in the nineteenth century should put such a preposterous query. Attend to your studies and household duties, fair maid, and leave such nonsense alone.

R. T. T.—An excellent blacking for harness is prepared by melting two ounces of mutton suet with six ounces of beeswax, to which are to be added six ounces of sugar candy, two ounces of soft soap dissolved in water, and one ounce of indigo finely powdered, and, when melted and well-mixed, a gill of turpentine. It is to be put on with a sponge and polished with a brush.

LITTLE PATSEY.

'Twas naughty little Patsy,
The terror of our row,
His mother kept the worst stuff shop,
And oh! he plagued us so,
I see his mop of fiery hair,
His nose so pert and queer,
The wicked little mouth that said
Things we were shocked to hear.

He stole our dolls, he broke our toys,
We ran in wrath to tell
The shabby mother in the shop,
Who vowed to whip him well.
We said it was a shame that he,
So dirty and so bad,
Should dare to come where well-bred we
Our pleasant playground had.

'Twas naughty little Patsy
One day we came to see;
And, looking in each other's eyes,
Asked if this thing could be;
No dirty, dreadful boy that day
Ran down our pretty street,
To shock us with his ragged hat
And shoeless, pattering feet.

And in the church we gathered,
Silent and strangely sad,
To see the toll-mother come
In sable wrappings clad.
We looked upon a little face,
All waxen, white and fair,
Laid on a pillow of pale flowers—
Could that be Patsy there?

"An angel," so the preacher said,
Awaiting up in heaven,
The mother who had tolled for him,
From morning until even,
We heard her sob; our tears fell fast,
We felt our wonder grow;
Could this be little Patsy—
The terror of our row?

"Had we but known," we whispered low,
As we passed all forlorn,
"We would have given kindly smiles
Instead of angry scorn."
An angel baby there he lay,
But no one told us so,
When we thought him wicked Patsy,
The terror of our row?

M. K. D.

E. NORMAN.—The Congress of Aix-la-Chapelle (1818) was held for the purpose of settling outstanding questions incident to the wars concluded by the treaties of Vienna. The conference resulted in freeing France from the allied army, which had remained in that country for nearly three years. It was attended by the Emperors of Russia and Austria and the King of Prussia in person, and by the representatives of the allied powers, Prince Metternich, Lord Castlereagh, Duke of Wellington, Count Hardenburg, Bismarck, Neuseirola, and Capo d'Istria. France being invited to co-operate, sent the Duke de Richelieu. Aix-la-Chapelle is a town of Rhenish Prussia, and famous for the number of treaties concluded there.

F. R. H.—1. The term "boycotting" originated as follows:—Captain Boycott was the agent of the owner of an estate in Ireland, and the tenants having become dissatisfied with his methods of managing the estate, asked the landlord to remove him. This he declined to do, and the tenants and their friends refused to work for or under Boycott, and they made an agreement among themselves that none of them should assist him during harvest-time, and the crops had to be gathered under the protection of troops. Subsequently the tenantry extended their "boycotting" to all persons having dealings with Boycott in any form, no one buying of or selling to them. 2. "The Knights of Pythias" is out of print. Only one edition was printed.

DASH.—The following harmless mixture is recommended as an excellent hair-curling medium:—Place 2 ounces of borax and 1 drachm of gum-arabic in one quart of hot (not boiling) water; stir, and as soon as the ingredients are dissolved, add 3 tablespoonfuls of strong spirits of camphor. On retiring to rest wet the hair with this liquid and roll it in twists of paper as usual.

GRACE.—There are numerous magazines and periodicals in which you might get a showing for your literary efforts, but we cannot recommend any special one of these. Do not be discouraged if success does not crown your first attempts, as the literary fold is filled with first-class writers who have served a thorough apprenticeship, and only reached their present position by the most persistent struggling.

E. H. B.—John Tillotson was born at Sowerby, near Halifax, in 1630. He died in London on Nov. 22, 1694. His father was a strict Calvinist, but the son having been converted from Puritanism, took orders in the English church, and in 1691 became Archbishop of Canterbury. He married a niece of Cromwell. For the copyright of his manuscript sermons his widow received 2,500 guineas.

C. H. G.—Being totally unacquainted with your general state of health, habits, &c., it would be a hard matter to give an opinion as to the true cause of the unusual redness of your nose. On that account, therefore, we would recommend an immediate consultation with a first-class medical practitioner, who will thus be able to diagnose and treat the trouble with a perfect personal knowledge of its requirements.

ALICE COMEY.—The Hon. William Robert Spencer, a society man, wrote the poem "To the Lady Anne Hamilton" in which occurs the stanza:—

"Too late, I stayed—forgive the crime
Unheeded flew the hours;
How noiseless falls the foot of Time,
That only treads on flowers!"

Spencer's poetical frame rests chiefly on the poem of three short stanzas quoted from.

G. H. R.—1. "Kismet" is a Turkish word, signifying fate, or destiny. 2. The water of Ardenne came from a mystical fountain, and was said to possess the power of converting love to hate. The legend states that this fountain was created by the ancient Welsh prophet and enchanter, Merlin, who is said to have flourished during the fifth century, his father being a demon and his mother a Welsh princess. This water is mentioned in several ancient poems, principal among which is Spencer's "Faery Queen." It also appears in Tennyson's "Idylls of the King." 3. As this column is especially set apart for answering correspondents' queries, they need not expect us to reply by post, excepting under extraordinary circumstances.

L. D. N.—1. An ink eraser made according to the following formula is very highly recommended:—Place 1 pound of chloride of lime in 4 quarts of soft water, and after shaking thoroughly, allow the mixture to stand for twenty-four hours, in order that the chloride may be dissolved. Then strain through a cotton cloth and add a teaspoonful of commercial acetic acid to every ounce of the chloride of lime water. This erasing fluid is used by dipping the reversed end of the penholder and applying it, without rubbing, to the word, figure or blot intended to be erased. When the ink has disappeared, the fluid must be taken up with a blotter, and the paper is ready to write upon again.

C. F.—In making chocolate colours use the following ingredients:—Four eggs, the weight of the eggs in sugar, half their weight in flour, 1 teaspoonful of soda and 1 teaspoonful of cream tartar, sifted well with the flour. If you bake these often it would be advisable to have a set of small tins made, about five inches long and two wide, round at the bottom and kept firm by strips of tin connecting them. If you cannot get these, tick stiff writing-paper into the same shape, stitching each of them to its neighbour after the manner of a pontoon bridge. Have these made and buttered before mixing the cake. Then mix the above articles into a batter with water or milk, place a spoonful of the batter into each of the receptacles, and bake in a steady oven. When nearly cold, cover the rounded side with a caramel icing, made by boiling together 1 cake of chocolate, 1 cup of sweet milk and 1 tablespoonful of corn-flour, vanilla and powdered sugar being added after the mixture has fairly come to a boil.

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† We cannot undertake to return rejected manuscripts.

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